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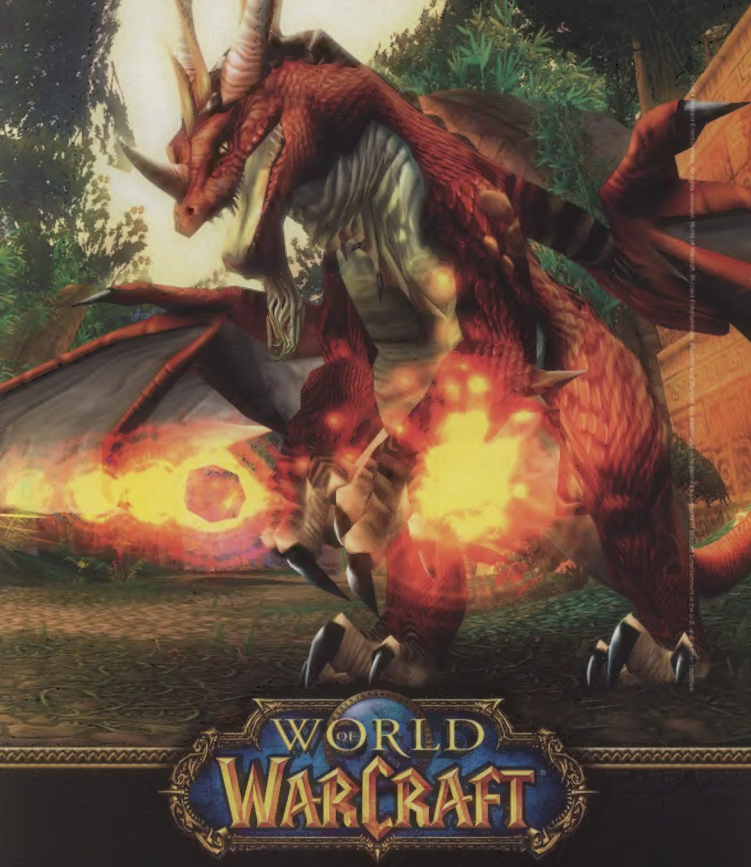

MASSIVELY EPIC ONLINE

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contents

COVER: *Elric* by Matt Stewart. RIGHT: Wendy Froud's *And They Danced*. Both images are on display at the Duirwaigh Gallery. See story page 56.

departments

8 CONTRIBUTORS

10 MOVIES
By Resa Nelson
Elektra breaks new ground and attempts to redefine the "superhero movie."

16 FOLKROOTS
By Terri Windling
Sir James M. Barrie was the little boy who wouldn't grow up.

26 BOOKS
By Gahan Wilson and Paul Witcover
The political and the profound come together in the latest fantasy offerings.

56 GALLERY
By Ari Berk
The Duirwaigh Gallery is a treasure trove of the fantastic, and home to some of fantasy's best and brightest.

86 GAMES
By Eric T. Baker
Fable brings a new level of RPG realism to your video screen.

fiction

34 RETURNING MY SISTER'S FACE
By Eugie Foster
Honor is a precious thing, and an awful thing to lose. But to have it stolen is a fate worse than death.

42 ALL FISH AND DRACULA
By Liz Williams
You might think you know what haunts the streets of Samhain. You might be right and you might be very wrong.

48 FIR NA TINE
By Sandra McDonald
For Lisa, sex is as exciting as playing with fire ... and just as dangerous.

62 CRAB APPLE
By Patrick Samphire
Sometimes it's easier to embrace the wildness in life than it is to fight it. Sometimes it's more effective, too.

68 THE GOOD DOCTOR
By Melissa Lee Shaw
Philosophers have proposed that ethical behavior provides the greatest good for the greatest number. Sometimes this can be much more difficult in practice than in history.

80 PEAS AND CARROTS
By Michael Canfield
Sometimes it really takes a leap of faith to break out of the roles that life has assigned you.

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contributors

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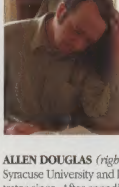
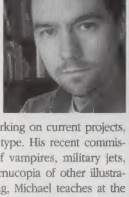


MICHAEL CANFIELD *(left)* has published short stories on *www.strangehorizons.com*, *www.futurismic.com*, *Flytrap*, and the anthologies of *MOTA3: Courage*, and *From the Borderlands*. In 1999 Michael attended Clarion University in East Lansing, and he currently resides in the pacific northwest. Michael's Web site can be found at: *www.michaelcanfield.net*.

ALLEN DOUGLAS *(right)* received a BFA in illustration from Syracuse University and has been working as a freelance illustrator since. After spending eight years in New York City, his studio is now located in his hometown of Rochester, NY, on the southern shores of Lake Ontario. Currently, he teaches at the Rochester Institute of Technology and is a member of the Association of Science Fiction & Fantasy Artists, and the Society of Illustrators in New York. On his drawing board right now are various pieces to be used in children's history books.



MICHAEL KERR *(below)* is an illustrator from the Western Canadian city of Calgary, Alberta. He spends a good amount of time each day sketching in local coffee shops, working on current projects, and just being a bohemian artist type. His recent commissions have included paintings of vampires, military jets, drawings of politicians, and a cornucopia of other illustration subjects. When not illustrating, Michael teaches at the Alberta College of Art and Design.

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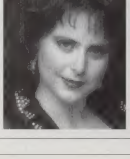

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By Resa Nelson

Elektra breaks new ground and attempts to redefine the "superhero movie."

Director Rob Bowman doesn't want to make a superhero movie–ever. It's not his thing. That's why he took a comic book character and created a movie that's a fantasy instead of a traditional comic book story.

It makes sense. Bowman is best known for directing and producing TV's *X-Files*, and he has three Golden Globe awards to prove it. He also directed the *X-Files* movie (Fight the Future) and Reign of Fire. His sense and sensibilities are rooted in fantasy and the supernatural.

Wielding her sais, Jennifer Garner looks to captivate audiences and help redefine the superhero genre in Elektra.

The *X-Files* was tied to Twentieth Century Fox, a studio where Bowman still has a lot of friends. A few years ago, Fox released *Daredevil*, starring Ben Affleck. Jennifer Garner starred opposite Affleck, and she knocked Fox's socks off. Garner played Elektra, a woman who's highly trained in martial arts but has no super powers.

When Fox decided to spin Elektra off into her own movie (scheduled for release on January 14), they asked Bowman to direct, not realizing he wouldn't be interested.

"I'd actually been sent the script a couple of times and passed on it," Bowman says.

But the studio persisted until Bowman agreed to a meeting.

"I heard the parameters of the budget, which were limited—certainly not in the Spiderman, Batman category," Bowman says. "And I said, 'If I think that I have $110 million less than Spiderman to make this, that's just depressing.

"But that's only depressing if I'm trying to make Spiderman-except it's Elektra. But I don't want to make that movie. I want to study the character, and I don't need effects for that. I don't need a lot of whiz-bang. What I just need is a good story and careful direction with Jennifer."

Because the studio had their hearts set on Bowman, they agreed. Bowman would call the shots on the story. "I told the studio that if I could investigate her character and not make it so much a superhero movie that it would be interesting to me. They agreed, and off I went."

Bowman began by looking at the original Electra. In Greek mythology, Electra was the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. While Agamemnon was away from home, his wife had an affair.

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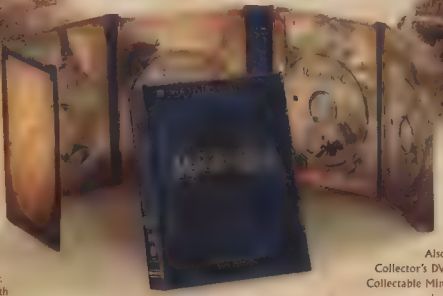

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Clytemnestra and her lover plotted to kill Agamemnon and succeeded They hoped to kill Electra's brother, as well, but Electra foiled those plans by sending him away to live with a relative Years later, Electra's brother returned and killed his mother and her lover to avenge his father's death In the work of Euripides, Electra helps her brother commit matricide

With that Greek myth tucked under his arm, Bowman then turned to the graphic novels by Frank Miller, who created Elektra. He originally added her to the *Daredevil* comics as a new character Thanks to her popularity, Marvel decided to pull her out of *Daredevil*'s world and make her the star of her own comics Miller wrote two graphic novels. *Elektra Saga* and *Elektra Assassin* Other writers have continued writing Elektra comics, now that Miller has moved on to Hollywood as a director

In the Marvel comics, Elektra is mean-

In addition to acting, the athletic Garner also performed most of her own stunts

spirited and cold hearted. Her character is a different spin on the Electra of Greek mythology. The modern-day Elektra isn't cold because she committed matricide—it's because she's witnessed other people commit murder

As a young girl she was a child of a very wealthy family," Bowman explains "Her father was mixed up in some nefarious business with some bad guys What he didn't realize was, he had a child prodigy in martial arts magic She was sought after by certain villains. Her father was asked if they could recruit her and make her a supreme warrior In punishing him for refusal, they killed her mother and eventually they killed him

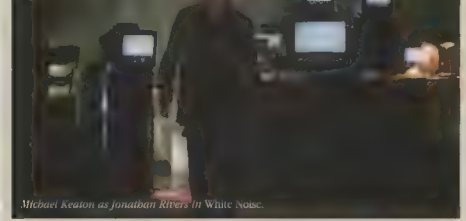
All the while, the girl has done nothing wrong. They sent her alone out into the world with the only skill she had, which was to kill people She became an assassin for hire, all the while haunted by why people did this to her family and why she is so unlucky to have this lifestyle

"Where the movie comes into play is through a reawakening of the goodness of Elektra's soul. It doesn't change the fact that she's an assassin or change the fact that she's a handful It just means she's trying to realize there's some humanity left in her"

WINTER 2005 MOVIE PREVIEW

This winter's movies promise to bring chills and thrills Although Halloween is long past, theaters will soon be filled with ghosts, were wolves, angels, and demons

January 17 ***White Noise*** (Universal) stars Michael Keaton as Jonathan Rivers, an architect whose life turns upside down when his wife mysteriously disappears. Her subsequent



Michael Keaton as Jonathan Rivers in White Noise.

death puts him on a dangerous path, thanks to a stranger who claims to have captured her voice on a tape recorder. But her voice wasn't recorded before she died—the stranger insists she's speaking from the grave

Jonathan becomes obsessed with contacting her on his own. He investigates EVP (electronic voice phenomenon) in a desperate attempt to talk to her Jonathan succeeds in opening a portal to an unseen world, but what's on the other side isn't what he's looking for In fact, it could be something quite dangerous

EVP is a real life phenomenon that producer Paul Brooks was eager to investigate before making the film Brooks had never heard of EVP but he learned it's a phenomenon that's been around for many years Brooks isn't alone Most people have never heard of EVP. "Somehow it seems it's something to do with radio waves that is opening some kind of portal here," Brooks says "One has to be circumspect about these things, but what interests me about this is, unlike crop circles and UFOs and all these things which are kind of distant from us here's something that is accessible for everybody Everybody can try this Everybody can experience this. And if this really catches, where this could go—it raises enormous questions about the nature of religion "

Officials at Universal also investigated EVP What the studio wasn't expecting was success They recorded voices that came out of nowhere "One makes up one's own mind about whether one thinks the voices are real or not," Brooks says, "but there have been so many examples of this that are now beginning to bubble up What's been rather extraordinary is there have been two specific examples of EVP occurring as part of Universal's early exploration of this. On two occasions, when the people at these two meetings tried EVP for themselves, two voices came through. That's pretty remarkable

"This could be mind blowing This could be like *The Da Vinci Code*, but real I think what's going to happen is, more and more people are going to try this for themselves. I think you're going to find extraordinary numbers all over America and all over the world of people trying EVP and things happening

"I just think there is something potentially, culturally, and sociologically life affecting here," Brooks says, "apart from the fact that it was a cracking script. It's a terrific thriller

I hope that people respond from both a cultural perspective and hope they find the movie itself very appealing "

February 11 ***Constantine*** (Warner Brothers) is a story about walking the line between heaven and hell Keanu Reeves (the *Matrix* trilogy) stars as John Constantine, an unusual man who has the ability to recognize half-breed angels and demons who walk among us, camouflaged as men and women It's a gift he's had since birth It's a gift he never asked for and doesn't want

Overwhelmed by what he sees on a daily basis, Constantine commits suicide Then his worst nightmare comes true—someone brings him back to life, forcing him to return to the

LEFT: Natassia Malthe as Typhoid Mary
RIGHT: Will Yun Lee as Kirigi

After witnessing the murder of both parents, Elektra devolves into an assassin who lives from assignment to assignment.

Producer Gary Foster says, "I think she calls herself an assassin operative, but there's no doubt there's a background in the Asian arts and the Shaolin shadow arts. She's not going to pick up a gun and shoot somebody. She will certainly use her sai's and her martial arts to win the day."

Elektra becomes the most deadly assassin in the world. She is essentially a killing machine—until one assignment forces her to make a choice that will change everything.

"It's the journey of a woman who has lost touch with humanity to finding a place where she can feel that she's a part of something and understand and feel," Foster says. "The three things that we kept saying were important to this film were, 'It's minimalist, it's emotional, and it's mythical.' And I think we were able to achieve that. This will not feel like a rehash of something you've seen before—and that's hard to do. I'm very happy about that."

The filmmakers used the graphic novel Elektra Saga as their main inspiration for the movie. Instead of using comic book elements, they wanted to the film to have a very real and natural look. So while they tapped into the character-driven journey that already existed in Elektra Saga, they set the story in the real world ... with a dash of magic thrown in.

ABOVE: Djimon Hounsou and Keanu Reeves in Constantine. *BELOW: Christina Ricci in a still released last March from Wes Craven's* Cursed.

very existence he was trying to escape. The only way he can save himself is to fight the demons on Earth. Until he's able to find his way out of the life he's stuck with, Constantine hates the world, God, and anybody who gets in his way.

Rachel Weisz stars as Angela Dodson, a police detective whose twin sister dies under mysterious circumstances. Despite her skepticism, Angela asks Constantine for help. They embark on an investigation in Los Angeles that reveals the existence of angels and demons to Angela, and leads to events that could spell catastrophe.

Constantine is another comic book character brought to screen, based on characters from the DC Comics/Vertigo *Hellblazer* Graphic Novels.

February 25 ***Cursed*** has spent the past year living up to its name.

Cursed has a promising pedigree. Kevin Williamson burst onto the Hollywood scene in 1996 with the movie *Scream*, which reinvented the horror genre with intelligence, a hip approach, and nifty dialog. *Scream* cleverly provided solid answers that connected story dots, something most horror films in the past have traditionally glossed over. *Scream* even poked fun at the "don't go in the basement" feeling all audiences have come to expect, while having fun with the genre's rules. Even better, *Scream* gave us a savvy heroine who used her brain to outwit everyone who threatened her in what became one of the most successful horror series in film history.

Likewise, Wes Craven is a Hollywood legend. His directing career began in the 1970s (*Last House on the Left*, *The Hills Have Eyes*) and kicked into full gear by the 1980s with films like *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. Craven also directed all three of Williamson's *Scream* scripts, so this is a team that's already proven its abilities.

At first glance, *Cursed* looks like a hip update on the classic werewolf thriller. The story revolves around an estranged brother and sister. Their parents are killed by werewolves, and now the siblings have to figure out how to protect themselves. Christina Ricci, Joshua Jackson, Portia de Rossi, and Shannon Elizabeth star.

According to many sources, *Cursed* may be poised to live up to its name. The movie was first scheduled for release a year and a half ago and has been scheduled for various dates then postponed many times. Rumor has it that the script was rewritten after the movie was shot, which required reshooting and recasting. While Williamson and Craven reportedly hope to create a new *Scream*-like series that features werewolves, let's see if the movie actually makes it into theaters this time.

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ABOVE Kirigi, Elektra's nemesis, leads his band of assassins known as "The Order of the Hand" RIGHT Elektra and Kirigi engage in fierce combat

Bowman explains the rules of the world he's created for Elektra. "A human being cannot run up the side of a building. People don't have lightning coming out of their fingers. There is black magic, and it means there could be somebody who can poison you with their touch, or somebody who can move through space quicker than we're used to. Assigning the title of 'black magic' as opposed to 'superhero powers'—it keeps it in its own category."

Because Bowman insisted on not making a superhero movie, *Elektra* promises to be a new type of genre that grew organically from his vision. "It's up to the audience to see if I did it," Bowman says. "It's also defined not so much by Elektra but by the main villain, Kirigi. He's a very unusual, soft-spoken, patient, non-blusterous villain. He's able to invade Elektra's mind and make her remember painful things. He tells her she's no good and a failure. And yet she's able to overcome. He's a very clever, cunning villain, but I think outside the box of what we're used to in this kind of movie."

"It's also inspired a little bit by Luc Besson," Foster says. "*La Femme Nikita* and *The Professional* are two films that all of us like and watched when we were creating this, because of the sparseness and a real interesting, detailed, character journey in those films. So we wanted to make a movie that felt a little bit like that but didn't stray too far from the Elektra journey."

The journey the filmmakers faced in getting the movie made was difficult because Garner was only available during her hiatus from TV's *Alias*. While the filmmakers catered to Garner's schedule, she reciprocated by giving her all.

She is an unbelievable athlete, and she cares so much about the physical performance," Foster says. "Jennifer will train seven days a week. I never met a more dedicated person in my life.

"Forget performance: she's the leader. If she's going to work that hard, we'd better work that hard. It sounds cute, but it's the truth. Everybody was floored by the level of commitment that she gives. Physically, she does those action sequences 99% by herself. She's proud of that fact. I think that's huge because you're not cheating on shots, and you don't have to have a stunt double in there and change the angle because the actress can't do it."

However, the greatest challenge Bowman faced was the very challenge he created, to stick to his vision and not let any superhero elements creep in. To stay true to his decision Bowman fell back on the reason why he wanted to make the movie: to study an interesting character.

Trying to keep her accessible as a person was helped a lot by the way Jennifer played the part," Bowman says. "Keeping it more mystical than fantastic. Keeping that tone straight through was a daily task. During filming and people having opinions, you just have to shepherd everybody down a straight and narrow path.

The studio took a leap of faith in giving Bowman cart blanche to create his own vision of Frank Miller's comic book character. Now that the movie is ready to hit the theaters, what's the verdict? What does the studio think?

There's a sparkle in Bowman's voice. "They said 'Wow. This is very deep. This is very original. We love it.' They're very excited. And for a major studio to be excited about a movie like this was very encouraging.

"It was very unconventional for a major studio to like this kind of film because it's so far off the beaten path. I thought they

would hate it if they didn't love it if they were going to hate it—there would be no middle ground."

While Bowman is pleased with the studio's response, there's something far more important weighing on his mind. Forget the past. Forget the present. Bowman has his eye on the future.

"I just hope—upon looking further into the comic book world and movies that attract a lot of kids—that it doesn't just have to be about eye candy and sizzle," Bowman says. "I'd like it if we could maybe make more of these kind of films for young kids.

"I don't want to say I'm all about messages, but there are some pretty powerful things to be said here about getting through tough times. I think clearly Elektra's life is about as bad as it can be. And yet she still pulls through, and what are the values and qualities within her that make her do that?

"It happens from the inside out. Her insides demand to be heard. She's denied paying attention to her inner voices, and her inner voices just refuse to be squelched any longer and start to lead her around."

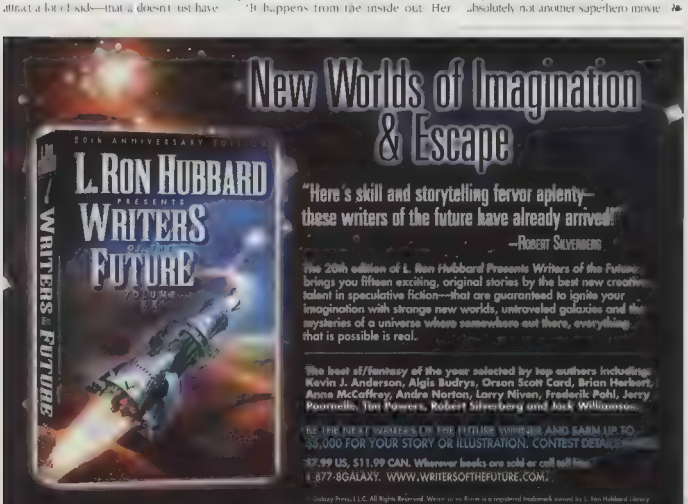
For a man who doesn't want to say he's all about messages, Bowman has a lot to say. He cares about what Elektra says and the type of role model she provides.

"Many of her troubles are so exaggerated that it might be familiar to a lot of people in the audience, especially young girls," Bowman continues. "Maybe mothers, too. She's left alone and tragically scarred for life. I think there might be similarities, although less dramatic, in many other people's lives and upbringings.

"Bad things happen to all of us, and you've got to overcome them. That certainly is the message of the movie. Because that is so realistic, through Jennifer's performance, I could not surround her with a bunch of whiz-bang, hypersonic, visual effects that we're used to in this kind of movie.

"I think it's original," Foster adds. "I think it's a unique look. There are a lot of successful films that have been out in the last few years. None of us want to copy each other. I think this film has a very unique feel and tone and emotion to it that gives it a mythical quality."

"I promise you," Bowman says. "Whether or you like it or not, it's a separate issue. It is absolutely not another superhero movie."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By Terri Windling

Sir James M. Barrie was the little boy who wouldn't grow up.

Peter Pan has become an endearing symbol of childhood for millions. Charles Vess's art graces the cover of Peter and Wendy

Charles Dickens once stated that Little Red Riding Hood was his first love, and if only he could have married her, he would have known perfect bliss. For myself and other women I know, our hearts were won by Peter Pan—that charming, exasperating rascal of a boy, killer of pirates and intimate of fairies. In our generation, we first encountered Peter as portrayed by the actress Mary Martin (in a televised version of the stage play *Peter Pan*), which created a certain gender confusion. Was Peter a boy we had a crush on, or a dashing tomboy that we wanted to be? We alternated between play-acting Wendy, flying through the stars at Peter's side, and play-acting the role of Peter himself, attacking pirates on the Jolly Roger. We dreamed of flight, fairy dust, Indian drums sounding in the woods, and leaving the bedroom window cracked in case Peter should appear. Then we all grew up, of course, as every child (but one) must do. Peter Pan became just a childhood game and a sappy Walt Disney film. Yet they say first love is powerful. Peter's influence may be stronger than we knew—for each of us women have spent our lives seeking adventure: in books, in art, and on foreign shores. Our hearts still quicken at the sound of a drum, or the smile of an exasperating boy. Now, on December 27, Peter Pan will turn 100 years old. This Folkroots column is dedicated to him, and to his creator, the Scottish author Sir James M. Barrie.

J.M. Barrie was already a well-known novelist and playwright when he sat down to write his first and only play for children, which he completed and offered to the theater producer Charles Frohman in the spring of 1904. It was unlike anything that had ever been presented to children on the London stage before, and Frohman loved it—except for the title, which Barrie obligingly changed from *The Great White Father*, to *Peter Pan, the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*. Incidentally, "Great White Father" is what Peter is called by Tiger Lily and her braves. Though it had roots in the British pantomime tradition, *Peter Pan* was a wholly original concoction blending pirate stories, desert island stories, Indian adventures, and fairy tales all wrapped around a satire of family life in Edwardian London. Frohman took an enormous commercial risk in backing a play of over fifty parts and of actors wired to soar above the stage. No one knew if this preposterous play would work, especially its anxious author. On opening night, Barrie was ill with nerves, holding his breath at the critical moment when Peter asks the audience to clap their hands if they believe in fairies. What if no one clapped at all? The audience, however, responded with such wild applause the actress playing Peter burst into tears. "I think everyone in the house believed in fairies," she recalled years later. "And I'm sure the play took them by surprise."

The opening of the play in December 1904 is now reckoned as the date of Peter's birth, for it marks the emergence of Peter as we know him: sword in hand and Tinker Bell at his side. Yet he really first

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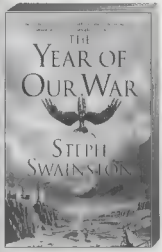

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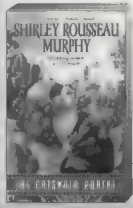

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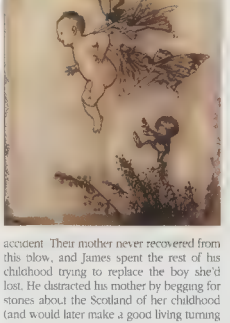
appeared two years earlier in Barrie's adult novel *The Little White Bird*. The novel's narrator is a crusty bachelor who lives close to London's Kensington Gardens, where he meets a small boy and establishes an intense relationship with him. He charms the boy with stories about fairies and about a runaway baby named Peter Pan who lives among the birds and fairies on an island in the Serpentine Lake. All babies were once birds, he tells the boy, and they still possess the power of flight. Parents, he warns, must keep their windows shut so that their babies don't fly off at night. Peter Pan is a baby who once heard his mother talk about the life he'd lead when he was grown, prompting him to fly to Kensington Gardens in order to avoid this fate. In the Gardens, he's neither bird nor baby but a creature who is "betwixt and between," glorying in his independence, determined to never grow up. Eventually, however, he tries to go back home, only to find that he's left it much too late. His mother has another baby now, and the nursery windows are firmly locked.

The Little White Bird, like most of Barrie's work, drew inspiration from the author's own life. He too lived close to Kensington Gardens, where he walked with his enormous St. Bernard dog, and where he first became friends with three little boys: George, Jack, and Peter Llewelyn Davies. Barrie held the boys spellbound with tales about magical goings-on in the park at night, when fairies emerged from the hollows of the trees, leaving messages for the boys to find. The first "Peter" in these stories was the real baby Peter flying off from the Llewelyn Davies nursery to join the fairies' revels at night—but soon a separate character emerged of the fairy child Peter Pan, who had once been a human baby but now lived in the wilds of the park. Barrie was an intensely autobiographical writer making his own life for story material to a degree that alternately charmed and exasperated the friends and family members who found themselves rendered into novels and plays. Thus to understand Peter Pan we must take a closer look at his creator and his complicated relationship with the Llewelyn Davies family.

Born in Kirriemuir, Scotland in 1860, James Barrie was the frail, unprepossessing seventh child in a family of ten. His father was a hand-loom weaver, and although the family was far from affluent, they were comfortable, and good educations were provided for the Barrie boys. The eldest son, Alexander, graduated from Aberdeen University with first-class honors in classics, and the next son, David, a brilliant boy, was expected to do even better. James, however, was a dreamy child more interested in games and "Penny Dreadfuls" (adventure comics) than excelling in academics. David was the acknowledged star of the family, but when he was thirteen and James was six, David died in a skating accident. Their mother never recovered from this blow, and James spent the rest of his childhood trying to replace the boy she'd lost. He distracted his mother by begging for stories about the Scotland of her childhood (and would later make a good living turning these stories into articles and books). David remained enshrined in memory as the perfect child who never aged or disappointed. "Nothing that happens after we are twelve matters very much," J.M. Barrie wrote many years later.



ABOVE: In this Arthur Rackham illustration, Peter plays his pipes for the fairies. BELOW: Peter and the fairies take flight.

Yet the years from ages thirteen to eighteen seem to have been the happiest of Barrie's own life, when he left his home and grieving mother to attend Dumfries Academy. Though Dumfries was co-educational, Barrie lived in a masculine world of sports, games, and intense friendships with other boys. He was small and thin, but good at football, cricket, fishing, and other sports. He was also especially good at games of make believe involving pirates, bandits, and other stock characters from the Penny Dreadfuls. These games evolved into a Dramatic Club, establishing Barrie's life long devotion to the theater. He wrote his very first play for the club, a melodrama called *Bandelero the Bandit*.

Barrie knew from quite an early age that he wanted to be a professional writer, but his mother had other plans for him. He was to follow the path that David would have taken to a career in the ministry. Barrie dutifully went off to earn his M.A. at Edinburgh University, where he was miserable. He had been popular among the boys in Dumfries, but at university he was at a loss. He was an odd looking young man, barely five feet tall, and appeared much younger than he was. The women ignored him, and the men embarrassed him with coarse talk about the opposite sex. Barrie retreated into solitude, turning shy and reticent—traits he'd retain even when he'd become the most successful writer in Great Britain.

Barrie obliged his parents by completing his degree, but returned home still determined to be a writer, landing a job with the Nottingham Journal and sending submissions off to the London papers. The St. James Gazette began to publish Barrie's stories of Scotland in his mother's day, and with this slim encouragement he moved to London at the age of 24. He went with little money and few contacts, yet within a very few years Barrie's work was appearing regularly in the top newspapers and journals in the country. He published three books about old Scotland: *Auld Licht Idylls*, *A Window in Thrums*, and *The Little Minister* which turned into surprise best-sellers, elevating him in literary circles and opening society's doors. Barrie's boyhood idol Robert Louis Stevenson proclaimed him to be a writer of genius, and Barrie's circle of friends now included Thomas Hardy, Henry James, William Meredith, Arthur Conan Doyle, and P.G. Wodehouse.

Barrie then turned his hand to writing plays, scoring successes with *When's Ghost* and *Walker, London*. He loved the theater, and he also loved to flirt with the pretty starlets of the day, though he never went beyond flirting until he met a young woman named Mary Ansell. Mary's career on the stage was undistinguished but she was lively and intelligent, and as the two grew close, the London society papers predicted an engagement. Mary waited while Barrie dithered about her. He worried that he was unsuited to marriage—as a child he'd even had nightmares about it—and the notes in his journals from the period show a man who is wracked with doubt. He loved Mary but did he love her deeply? Was he capable of a steady, adult love? He worried that the answer was no, but hoped that the act of marriage would mature him. He then proposed to Mary, married her in Scotland, and took her off on a Swiss honeymoon. The honeymoon was not a success, and Mary later referred to it as "a shock."

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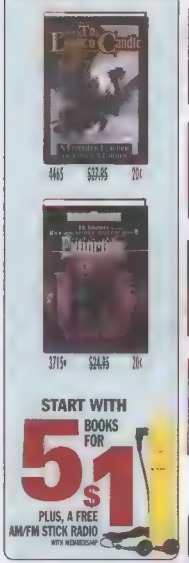

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Barrie's biographers suspect (as did many of his friends) that the marriage was never consummated, for he seems to have been an entirely asexual man, incapable of physical passion. In a journal entry recorded during his honeymoon he makes this note for a scene in a future play:

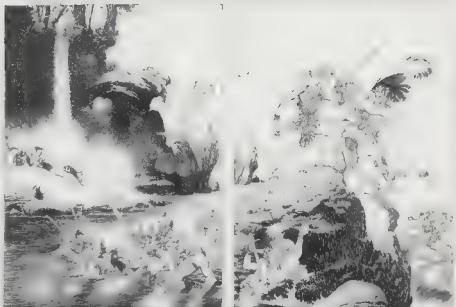
Wife*—Have you given me up? Have nothing to do with me? *Husband* calmly kind, no passion &c. *(à la self)

When the couple returned to London, Mary busied herself with their new house and dog, while Barrie retreated to his study and got to work. He produced new stories, new plays, a sentimental biography of his mother, and then began *Tommy and Grizel*, considered by many to be his finest novel. It is the tragic story of Tommy, a writer, who is married to his childhood friend Grizel. The marriage is not a happy one, for there's something vital lacking in Tommy—he cannot love Grizel, or any woman as he knows a woman ought to be loved. He's not like other men, he tries to explain, he's really just a boy who has never grown up. Barrie writes, "She knew that despite all he had gone through, he was still a boy. And boys cannot love. Oh, is it not cruel to ask a boy to love? .He gave her all his affection, but his passion, like an outlaw, had ever to hunt alone."

As Barrie's biographers have remarked, one can only imagine what Mary thought when she read passages like this in print, realizing that anything she said or did might be turned into story material. If Mary minded, however, she didn't show it. She carefully and dutifully kept up the public appearance of a perfectly normal marriage. There were compensations. She was wealthy now, and her husband was a celebrated man. If she didn't have his passion, and couldn't have his children, at least she had as much of Barrie's affection and attention as he had to give. In 1897, however, she began to lose even that.

For it was in 1897 that Barrie became acquainted with the three little boys in Kensington Gardens: five-year-old George, four-year-old Jack, and baby brother Peter. They talked about cricket, pirates, and fairies, and he dazzled them by the way he could wiggle his ears. Before long Barrie was meeting up with boys on a regular basis. He had always found it easier to make friends with children than he did adults. They didn't mind his moods, his long silences, they enjoyed his black humor and quirky stories, and accepted him as an overgrown boy rather than as one of the grown-ups.

Then on New Year's Eve, the Barries attended an elegant dinner party where Barrie was seated beside the beautiful wife of a young barrister. He soon discovered, to his astonishment, that this was Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, the mother of his friends George, Jack, and Peter. Sylvia discovered with equal amazement, that the mysterious man who could wiggle his ears was the famous author J.M. Barrie. Sylvia was no stranger to fame herself, for her father was George du Maurier, illustrator for Punch magazine and author of the novel *Trilby* (which introduced Svengali to the world). Additionally, her brother Gerald was a well-known actor and her husband Arthur was the son of John Llewelyn Davies, a prominent theologian. Sylvia was charmed by Barrie's enthusiasm for her beloved boys, and invited him to visit them at home. He promptly did so, and began reappearing there with increasing regularity.



Peter and Captain Hook duel as the Lost Boys take on Hook's crew in Mermaid's Lagoon

Soon Barrie was a fixture in Sylvia's household, much to the chagrin of her husband Arthur, who could not fathom why this strange little Scotsman was so constantly underfoot, and of Mary Barrie, disconcerted by this new focus in her husband's life. Neither Arthur nor Mary had cause to believe that Sylvia and Barrie had embarked on an affair but the intensity of Barrie's interest in Sylvia's family raised more than a few eyebrows. Sylvia, however, found nothing strange in it. Completely in love with her handsome husband, she saw nothing compromising in accepting Barrie's friendship, and nothing odd in his devotion to her darling boys. She pushed Arthur's objections aside and Arthur learned to hold his tongue, accepting Barrie's presence in their lives with as much stoicism as he could muster. Barrie's wife, for her part, made a point of befriending Sylvia and coped as best she could with the awkward fact that her husband was engrossed in the lives of another woman's children.

The question inevitably rises in relation to Barrie's involvement with the Llewelyn Davies boys whether he was a pedophile, or had repressed pedophilic tendencies. Nico Llewelyn Davies, the youngest of the boys, when asked about this after Barrie's death, dismissed the idea categorically. "I don't believe that Uncle Jim ever experienced what one might call 'a stirring in the undergrowth for anyone—man, woman, or child," said Nico. "He was an innocent, which is why he could write *Peter Pan*." Writer Andrew Birkin, who spent three years researching Barrie's life for his BBC television program *The Lost Boys*, interviewed many who had known J.M. Barrie and conducted an extensive correspondence with Nico. Nothing he read or heard indicated that Barrie had a sexual interest in the boys. "Barrie was impotent, it's fairly clear," says Birkin (on the DVD edition of his program). "That was the tragedy of his life. Had he not been impotent, I think he would have been a womanizer—he was always falling in love with his leading ladies over the stage lights. The suggestion that he was somehow pedophilic with these boys doesn't really stand up to close examination."

In 1900, Sylvia gave birth to Michael, who would grow to be Barrie's favorite of her sons. For now, however, it was still George, the eldest, who was the child closest to his heart. Barrie's novel *The Little White Bird* (1902) is transparently based upon his relationship with George. Captain W., the novel's protagonist, meets a charming little boy in Kensington Gardens, and he sets out to win the affections of both the boy and his beautiful mother. Like much of Barrie's fiction, the novel is too sentimental to suit most modern tastes (though saved by the delicious bite of Barrie's humor), and the intensity of the narrator's obsession with the boy makes for uncomfortable reading in our less innocent age. This tribute to children and childhood was, however, exactly suited to the temper of its day. "To speak in sober earnest," proclaimed the London Times, "this is one of the best things that Barrie has written. If a book exists that contains more

knowledge and more love of children, we do not know it." George was proud of inspiring the novel (even though it earned him teasing from his school fellows), and Sylvia loved it. What Arthur and Mary felt about the book is not recorded.

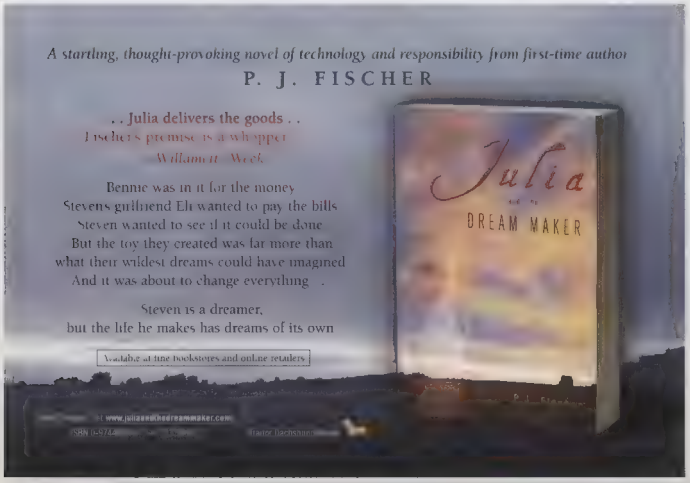
In 1903, Sylvia became pregnant with Nicholas (called Nico); her fifth and final child. The day before Nico's birth, Barrie started work on *Peter Pan*. Unlike baby Peter in *The Little White Bird*, this Peter would be an older boy who lives in distant Never Land (called Neverland or Never-never Land in some editions) where he'd have the adventures that Barrie had so often play-acted with Sylvia's children. Barrie set the first scene in the Darling house on a shabby street in Bloomsbury, "but you may dump it down anywhere you like," he wrote, "and if you think it was your house, you are very probably right." The beautiful Mrs. Darling was modeled on Sylvia, and the perfidious Mr Darling, rather unfairly, on Arthur. Barrie later explained to the Llewelyn Davies boys that Peter was made "by rubbing the five of you violently together, as savages with two sticks produce flame. That it is all he is, the spark I got from you."

Other sparks came from Scottish fairy stories which Barrie would have heard or read in his youth, particularly as he was a fan of the writer and folklore enthusiast Sir Walter Scott. The fairy stories that he drew upon

In this illustration by Charles Vess, Wendy weaves bedtime tales for Peter and the Lost Boys.

however, weren't sugar-sweet Victorian confections about tiny butterfly-winged sprites, but older, darker stories about the dangerous fairies of the Scottish folk tradition. In these tales, seductive, heartless fairies lure children into the fairy realm, an enchanted world that lies at the heart of the woods, or underneath the Scottish hills. Time passes differently in that realm. A single night spent with the fairies might be a hundred years in human time—so when the children go back home again, their parents are dead and gone. In "changeling" tales, the fairies snatch infants and pretty children from their beds, whisking them off to fairyland as pampered pets, companions, or slaves. Sometimes a fairy is left behind, glamoured to look like the stolen child: a bad-tempered, sickly, hungry creature who is a plague to the human parents. The lost children in changeling tales don't always find their way back home. Sometimes they stay under the hills, losing all memory of the mortal world just as John and Michael Darling forget their parents while living in Never Land.

Barrie's Peter Pan is human-born, not a fairy, but he's lived in Never Land so long that he's as much a fairy as he is a boy: magical, capricious, and amoral, like the fairies of the old Scots tradition. He's a complex mixture of good and bad, with little understanding of the difference between them. He is both cruel and kind, thoughtless and generous, arrogant and tender-hearted, bloodthirsty and sentimental. He is a classic trickster character—kin to Puck, Robin Goodfellow, and other delightful but exasperating sprites of fairy lore. He's a liminal creature, standing on the threshold between fairy and child, mortal and immortal,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villain (when he lures children from their homes) and hero (when he rescues them from pirates)

Peter's last name derives from the Greek god Pan, the son of the trickster god Hermes by a wood nymph of Arcadia. Pan is a creature of the wilderness, associated with vitality, virility, and ceaseless energy. In the ancient writings of Servius we find this detailed description. Pan is "formed in the likeness of nature with horns to resemble the rays of the sun and the horns of the moon; his face is ruddy in the imitation of ether, he wears a spotted fawn skin resembling the stars in the sky, his lower limbs are hairy because of the trees and the wild beasts, he has the feet of a goat to resemble the stability of the earth, his pipe has seven reeds in accordance with the harmony of heaven, his pastoral staff bears a crook in reference to the pastoral year which curves back on itself, and finally he is the god of all nature." Pan's young namesake does not have goat legs or horns, but he does ride on the back of a goat, and he plays the pan-pipes, an instrument Pan invented from hollow reeds.

Like Peter, the god Pan is a contradictory figure. He haunts solitary mountains and groves, where he's quick to anger if he's disturbed. However, he also loves company, music, dancing, and riotous celebrations. He is the leader of a woodland band of satyrs; these "Lost Boys" are a wilder crew than Peter's

In this illustration by Arthur Rackham, taken from Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, *Peter sits in a tree while going over his adventures with old Solomon Caw*

famed for drunkenness, licentiousness, and creating havoc (or "panic"). Pan himself is a distinctly lusty god, and here the comparison must end, for Peter's wildness has no sexual edge. Indeed, it's sex and the other mysteries of adulthood that he's specifically determined to avoid. Peter tells Wendy, "You mustn't touch me. No one must ever touch me."

Despite the Llewelyn Davies boys' initial objections, Barrie added three girls to Peter's story: Wendy Darling, the fairy Tinker Bell, and the Indian princess Tiger Lily. "Wendy" was a nonexistent name at the time. It came from a child named Margaret Henley who referred to Barrie as her "friendy." Since she couldn't pronounce her "f"s and "r"s, the word came out as "Wendy". Tinker Bell was originally called Tippy in the earliest drafts of the play, and Tiger Lily's tribe is called the Piccaninnies—a name mercifully left out of modern renditions. (Barrie's Indians are fantasy Indians, the "savages" imagined by Edwardian children and have as much to do with actual Indians as Nana the dog has to do with actual nannies.) Captain Hook comes directly from the make-believe games that Barrie played with George and his brothers, as well as from the pirates in the Penny Dreadfuls that Barrie loved as a child. Hook was first portrayed on the London stage by Gerald du Maurier (Sylvia's brother), who brought such menace to the role that children were carried screaming from the stalls. "How he was hated," recalled his daughter, the novelist Daphne du Maurier, "with his flourish, his poses, his dreaded diabolical smile. That ashen face, those blood

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red lips, the long, dank, greasy curls; the sardonic laugh, the maniacal scream, the appalling courtesy of his gestures." Hook's villainy was never entirely played for laughs—he was allowed to be a truly menacing figure, saving the role from pure camp and adding gravity to Peter's story

While Barrie was busy with the enormous task of making this extravagant fantasia work on stage, Arthur Llewelyn Davies made a sudden move and relocated his family to Berhamsted, twenty-five miles away from London. Barrie still came to visit them, but he could no longer be a daily presence. Instead, he wrote wistful letters to the boys as he hovered anxiously around the theater, watching his actors learn to fly and *Peter Pan* come to life. Peter himself was played by a young starlet (Nina Boucicault in the first London production, Maude Adams in New York) largely because of labor laws preventing child actors from working after 9 PM, but also because of the British pantomime tradition in which the Principal Boy was always played by a girl Great secrecy surrounded the *Peter Pan* rehearsals, which of course made the press and the public all the more eager to learn what Barrie had up his sleeve On the opening night of December 27, 1904, Sylvia and the boys came into town to accompany the nervous author to the theater Back in New York, producer Charles Frohman waited to learn if he had a hit or a disaster Finally a cable came *Peter Pan* was an overwhelming success The critics were charmed, and more importantly to Barrie an audience full of children was enthralled. So many little children were injured, however, by going home and jumping from the furniture that he hastily rewrote the opening scene to explain that "fairy dust" was required to fly

With this new success, Barrie was busier than ever. He visited Sylvia and the boys as often as his schedule would allow, but the family was happily settled in Berkhamsted, and Barrie was busy back in London with new stories, new plays, and a variety of political and charitable causes Then, in 1906, disaster struck Arthur was diagnosed with cancer, requiring an operation that would remove half of his jaw and palate Barrie was immediately at his side, dropping everything to put himself at Arthur's assistance, as well as quietly picking up the cost of his expensive medical treatment. When the operation was completed, Arthur's face was a ruin and he could barely speak. Barrie remained posted at his bedside—nursing him, reading to him, conversing with him (as Arthur communicated by writing) Arthur found Barrie kinder and wiser than he expected, and the relationship between the two men changed When Arthur came home from the hospital, Barrie was a welcome (and necessary) presence in the household The two families spent their summer holidays together, and everyone insisted that Arthur was getting better. By autumn how ever, the tumor had spread, and by the following spring, Arthur was dead

Arthur left little money behind, so Barrie took over the family's support. He had earned a small fortune from *Peter Pan* and insisted it was there as much as his Sylvia brought the family back to London, to a house near Barrie and Kensington Gardens "And here, I think, Sylvia did succeed, gradually, in regaining something of the zest for life," wrote Peter Llewelyn Davies, years later, about his mother "The boys were a fond amusement and distraction for her, relatives came frequently, and the dog-like J M B still living at Leinster Corner and in constant attendance Everything must have been done by all who had the care of us and above all by Sylvia herself, to shut out the imp of sorrow and self pity from our young lives

Daily life went on. Barrie continued to write, and *Peter Pan* continued to cast its spell It was now the most famous of Barrie's works The tale of Peter Pan as a baby, originally published in *The Little White Bird*, was now available in a separate children's book edition, called *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, with illustrations by Arthur Rackham The script of the play was published under the title *Peter Pan, the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*, and eventually Barrie novelized the story of the play in a book titled *Peter and Wendy* He ended this volume with a brand new scene in which Peter comes back to Wendy's window years later, and discovers she is all grown up The little girl in the nursery now is Wendy's daughter Jane. The girl examines Peter with interest, and soon she's off to Never Land herself Her mother can no longer go, no matter how much she longs to follow

Barrie's relationship with the Llewelyn Davies family finally took its inevitable toll on his marriage. In 1909, he learned that his wife was having an affair with a young writer, Gilbert Cannan She intended to marry Cannan, she told Barrie, and she wanted a divorce. Barrie disappeared to Switzerland while the scandal raged in the London papers, then returned to London in October for the ordeal of the divorce proceedings. Two days after the case was over, Sylvia collapsed at home Now she, too, was diagnosed with cancer, in a form impossible to treat. As was the practice of the time, she was not allowed to know how ill she was, though as the illness went on, she suspected that she was dying. She remained in bed until the following spring, seeming to improve a little in the summer, and insisted on taking her boys on a fishing holiday to Devon While the boys fished, she grew weaker and weaker The children were not told she was dying She slipped away on August 27th, with her mother and Barrie in the room. Barrie was left to break the news to the boys as they returned from the river

Barrie now assumed all responsibility for the boys The elder three were at Eton by this time, where their school fees had long been paid by Barrie. Michael and Nico remained at home supervised by their

FURTHER READING

Nonfiction:

J M Barrie and the Lost Boys, by Andrew Birkin (Yale University Press, 2003)

J M Barrie: The Man Behind the Image, by Janet Dunbar (Collins, 1970)

Fifty Years of Peter Pan, by Roger Lancet Green (Davis,1953)

The Peter Pan Chronicles, by Bruce K. Hanson(Carol Publishing, 1995)

"The Boy Who Couldn't Grow Up: James Barrie," by Alison Lurie (in *Don't Tell the Grown-ups*, Back Bay Books, 1998)

Barrie: The Story of J.M.B., by Denis Mackail (Ayer Co., 1977)

Letters of James M. Barrie, by Viola Meynell (Norwood Editions, 1942)

Fiction:

Peter Pan and the Only Children, by Gilbert Adair (Dutton, 1988)

Wendy, by Karen Wallace (Simon & Schuster, 2004)

The Lost Girls, by Laurie Fox (Simon & Schuster, 2004)

"Never Never" by Bruce Glassco (in *The Faery Reel*, Viking, 2004)

Second Star to the Right, by Mary Alice Kruesi (Avon, 1999)

"Peter" by Pat Murphy (*The Year's Best Fantasy & Horror, Volume 5*, St Martin's Press, 1992)

After the Rain, by Emily Soma (Daisy Books, 2003)

"Lost Girls," by Jane Yolen (in *Twelve Impossible Things Before Breakfast*, Harcourt, 1997)

Art:

Peter Pan. The Complete Unabridged Text, illustrated by Scott Gustafson (Viking, 1991)

Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, illustrated by Arthur Rackam (Book Span, 2001)

Peter Pan and Other Stories, illustrated by Paula Rego (The Folio Society, 1992)

Peter and Wendy, illustrated by Charles Vess (Starscape, 2003)

Music:

Peter and Wendy, the Celtic-flavored soundtrack to a 1997 stage production, with lovely music by Johnny Cunningham, Seamus Egan, Susan McKeown, and others. (Alula, 1997)

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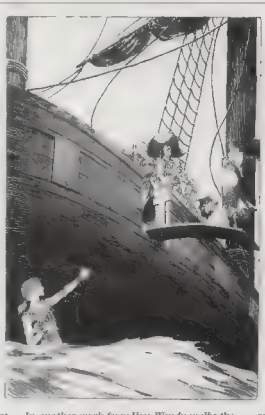
nanny, Mary Hodgson, with Barrie living close by. Barrie was now an extremely wealthy man and he lavished money on his young wards. Clothes, books, sports equipment, and extravagant summer holidays– anything to help ease the ease the grief of losing their parents. Of all the boys, Michael was the most like Barrie. He was a dreamy, fey, creative child, and they were thus attached to each other. At Eton Michael wrote to Barrie every day. There were more than two thousand letters between them, which were later burned by Peter (the family archivist), who was embarrassed by their sentimentality.

Barrie's literary star continued to rise, and he was awarded a baronetcy in 1913. George started university that year, where he remained on close terms with his guardian, but Jack, who was in the Navy now, and more independent than his brothers, resented the dominant role that Barrie had taken in their lives. The following year, Barrie took all of the boys except Jack to Scotland for a fishing holiday (Jack was on a ship in the North Atlantic), and it was there that they learned the news that England was now at war with Germany. George and Peter, like so many young men, immediately signed up to defend their country, and by December George's battalion was posted to the Western Front. With *The Little White Bird* packed in his kit-bag, he departed for the trenches of France, sending fond and cheerful letters back to Barrie and urging him not to worry. In March, George sent a letter from the Front saying, "Keep your heart up, Uncle Jim, and remember how good an experience this is for a chap who's been very idle before. Lord, I shall be proud when I'm home again, and talking to you about all this. That old dinner at the Savoy will be pretty grand." By the time the letter reached London, George Llewelyn Davies had been shot and killed.

"I have lost all sense I ever had of war being glorious," Barrie had written to George, "it is just unspeakably monstrous to me now." Sylvia's brother Gerald (the original Captain Hook) also died that year in the mud of France, and Charles Frohman drowned shortly thereafter in the sinking of the Lusitania. Barrie despaired, fearing the war would swallow everything and everyone he loved—but peace was declared before Michael came of age, and Jack and Peter came safely home. Peter never fully recovered from horrors he witnessed at the Front and struggled with depression for the rest of his life (and committed suicide many years later). For now, however life went on. Jack married a girl he'd met while stationed in Scotland. Nico, the youngest, left home for Eton. Michael started at Oxford University, where he cut a dazzling figure. His close friend (and probable lover) Roger Stenhouse introduced him into Lytton Strachey's Bloomsbury circle, where Strachey pronounced him "the only young man at Oxford or Cambridge with real brains." Michael was handsome, brilliant, a gifted writer, and seemed to have the world before him. And just before his twenty-first birthday, he drowned in a boating accident.



In another work from Vess, Wendy walks the plank while Hook and his band of scoundrels look on

Like his mother, undone by the death of her son David, Barrie never fully recovered from Michael's loss, particularly since it came on the heels of losing Arthur, Sylvia, George, Gerald du Maurier, and Charles Frohman. He aged visibly, and for a long while barely had the will to go on living. But go on he did, supported by his affection for the three remaining "Lost Boys," and a brand new audience to charm with stories of pirates, indians, and fairies. He continued to write, to socialize, to travel, and to stay active in charitable and political causes until he died in 1937, with Peter and Nico at his bedside. "To die will be an awfully big adventure," Barrie once wrote in the voice of Peter Pan. In his will, he left the *Peter Pan* royalties to the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children.

When Barrie commissioned the Peter Pan statue by Sir George Frampton that stands in Kensington Gardens to this day, he hoped it would allow Peter to be remembered long after his play was forgotten. Little did he know, that one hundred years later, Peter would be as popular as ever, and there would be few children who didn't know his story. Peter's story has inspired several other works of fiction for both children and adults, and Barrie's life has inspired two dramatic productions. the excellent BBC television series *The Lost Boys*, and the new film *Finding Neverland*. As I write this article, *Finding Neverland* (starring Johnny Depp as J.M. Barrie and Kate Winslet as Sylvia Llewelyn Davies) has not yet hit the theaters and although it's hard to imagine the handsome, charismatic Depp playing the homely, awkward, asexual Scottish playwright, it looks to be a charming tale. Whether it stays true to the details of Barrie's actual story remains to be seen. Andrew Birkin's *The Lost Boys*, on the other hand, is based entirely on the known facts of J.M. Barrie's life, drawn from a vast array of surviving journals, correspondence, manuscripts, and photographs, as well as extensive interviews with those who knew James Barrie. The last of the Lost Boys, Nico Llewelyn Davies, read and advised on Birkin's script. When the final production was broadcast, Llewelyn Davies phoned up Birkin in tears, "undone," he said, by the way actor Ian Holm had turned into his Uncle Jim. I highly recommend the series, which is available on DVD. Birkin's Website, www.jmbarrie.co.uk, where he generously makes the Barrie material that he owns available to fans and scholars, is also recommended.

James M. Barrie was a boy who *couldn't* grow up, and out of this conundrum he gave us Peter, the boy who *wouldn't* grow up. Peter is a character so vivid, so universal, and so emotionally true that he seems to belong to folklore now, not to one author's imagination. One hundred years later, children still dream of flying off to Never Land, where they'll never bathe, eat broccoli, or (worst of all) grow up. A few years ago I knew a boy who referred to adults like me as "human beings". "Aren't you a human being too?" I asked. With a look of scorn for the stupidity of my question, he answered, "I'm not a human, I'm a child." I pointed out that one day he was going to grow up to be a human too. He shook his head and insisted, "No, I'm going to stay a little boy." J.M. Barrie would have perfectly understood, and advised him to keep his bedroom window cracked. ❧

Terri Windling, who originated and still edits the Folkroots column, is a seven-time winner of the World Fantasy Award. She is a consulting editor for Tor Books, and has edited over thirty anthologies, many of them in partnership with Ellen Datlow. She won the Mythopoeic Award for her novel The Wood Wife, *and has also published children's books, short stories, and nonfiction. She also edits the on-line Endicott Studio Journal of Mythic Arts, www.endicott-studio.com.*

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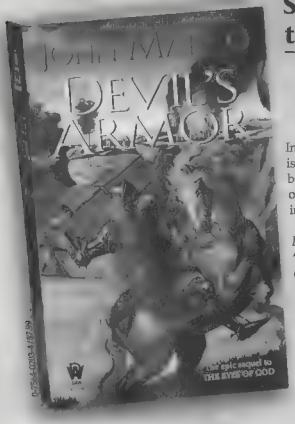

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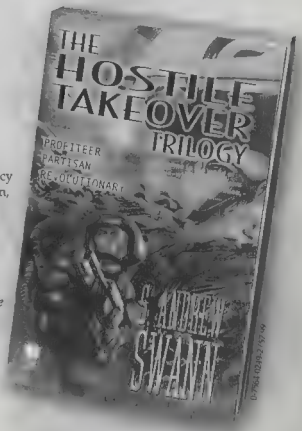

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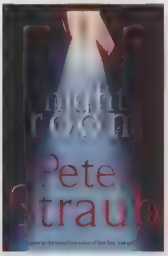
The political and the profound come together in the latest fantasy offerings.

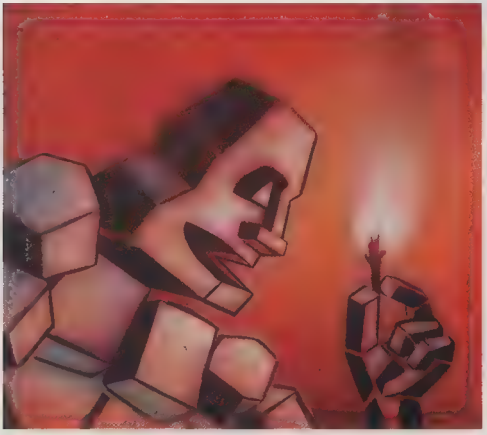
From the first Peter Straub has always not only been an extraordinarily interesting writer of frightening fantasies, he's also steadily and consistently been an astonishing innovator of the form. Book by book, throughout his whole career, his hugely entertaining novels have grown richer. Each one is packed fuller with increasingly delightful surprises and challenges; each is at least a little more lingeringly scary, a tad more profoundly witty and—very importantly—even more kindly than the one before.

Recently Straub has taken off in a wonderful new direction by writing a series of books which charmingly combine horror fantasy with the games played in detective stories and brilliantly used that mix to explore the differences between reality and imagination.



In The Night Room (Random House New York, trade hardcover, 330 pp., $21.95) is the latest and deepest experiment in this new departure and is a sequel to his last book, *lost boy lost girl*. This time he cuts to the chase in his exploration of the boundaries—or the possible lack thereof—between fact and fiction by making both of his main characters professional authors. Tim Underhill, a highly successful author of fantastic novels (including the soon-to-be published *lost boy lost girl*) and the sweetly beautiful Willy Patrick, the also highly successful author of Young Adult novels whose latest one (*In the Night Room*) recently won her the coveted Newberry Medal.

Peter Kuper's art is found in the new politically-charged graphic novel Stroks and Stones



Straub has a wonderful time exploring the sad, funny, and highly touching reasons why Tim and Willy became, and persist in continuing to be, authors (the notion that Tim feels a great identity with Scheherazad is particularly hilarious). During the action of the novel, superb use is made of the sort of stuff anyone who has cranked out a few books will be familiar with, including a sensationally weird and funny scene that takes place during a Barnes & Noble bookstore talk and signing gig and strange encounters with profoundly insane book collectors. The collectors Tim encounters have the beautifully eerie conviction that amongst the many first edition books, printed of an author's books the most desirable are the very rare fluke

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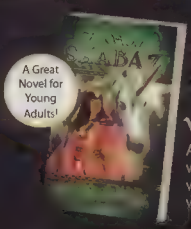

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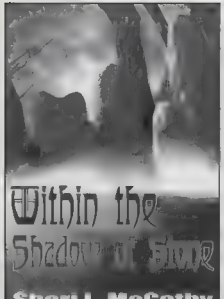

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copies of the perfect, flawless book the author was all along trying to produce, but failed to pull off. I am sure this notion will subtly disturb me to my dying day.

In the Night Room is haunted by many ghosts, some of them relatively conventional types who appear before one on the sidewalk in broad daylight to mouth obscure warnings and other more obscure and up-to-date ones, which haunt the labyrinth of one's e-mail system to explain (among many other strange things) the agonizing processes you and I and Tim Underhill must go through after death. Not the least disturbing thing about what they're saying is that it's altogether a rather logical and not altogether unconvincing system. Let us hope it is merely fiction merely the nutty idea of a highly imaginative author.

I will give no hint as to the main reason why Tim and Willy are so obsessively drawn to and intertwined with one another and find themselves fleeing across the landscape, but their love story is the heart and soul of this book which, with all its genuine scariness, sensationally galloping plot (do be warned: you will have to constantly fight cheating and peeking a few pages ahead because it's so hard to bear the suspense), and its multitude of villains and outright monsters, may well be one of the most tender, kind, genuinely sweet, and downright uplifting books I ever read.

I think I said of his last book that I thought it was the best he ever wrote, but I was wrong. This one is.

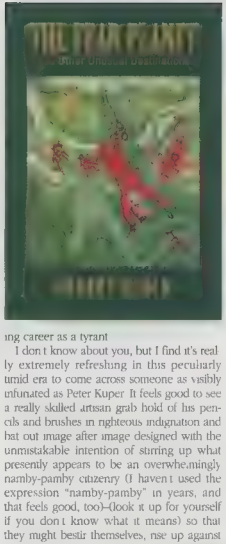
And probably the next one will be, too.

The last work of Peter Kuper's I mentioned hereabouts was his superb graphic adaptation of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and now I'm happy to report he's come out with a potent allegorical fable of his own called ***Sticks and Stones*** (Three Rivers Press, New York, trade paperback, 128 pp., $13.95) which eschews all use of words and tells its tale with stark images in color and in black and white.

The cover blurb gives fair warning that the book is unabashedly political by stating that it "chronicles the rise of an empire and the consequences of hubris" and observes that it is a "cautionary tale for our present day world."

The first pages of the book show a volcano ominously starting to smoke and then spewing a great lump of molten crud out onto a vast, debris-littered plane. The lump cools and eventually solidifies into a huge, apelike creature of stone that stumbles and falls jarringly at every other step.

Eventually the thing learns to heave itself along in a clumsy, lurching shuffle, but when it sets itself to piling together a crude castle only to see it ignominiously collapse, it realizes it is unable to do much on its own and so enslaves a race of clever little beings. It bullies them into building a far more durable castle and begins a flourishing career as a tyrant.



I don't know about you, but I find it's really extremely refreshing in this peculiarly timid era to come across someone as visibly infuriated as Peter Kuper. It feels good to see a really skilled artisan grab hold of his pencils and brushes in righteous indignation and hit out image after image designed with the unmistakable intention of stirring up what presently appears to be an overwhelmingly namby-pamby citizenry. (I haven't used the expression "namby-pamby" in years, and that feels good, too)—look it up for yourself if you don't know what it means) so that they might bestir themselves, rise up against those exploiting them with transparent cynicism and bring the bastards down.

The book's loaded with visuals that are sometimes painfully strong. I'm particularly fond of a little sequence where the great lump of an oppressor contemptuously crowns the little creature it has chosen to rule the other little creatures by putting a randomly chosen pebble on the tiny fellow's flat little head.

I also like the artist's ability to hope and to trust in simple things since there's so little of that going around these days. You should see what he does with a little musical note.

You'll like what he does with that little musical note. It will make you feel better. It may even give you a little gumption (and gumption is another word I've haven't heard in quite some time!).

Buy the book and see for yourself.

The Fear Planet and Other Unusual Destinations (The Reader's Bloch, Volume One) (Subterranean Press, Burton MI, deluxe hardcover, 300 pp., $40.00) is the first volume of a projected series of Robert Bloch stories that one way or another never managed to escape heretofore from the yellowing pages of old pulp magazines and I say Huzzah! and High Time!

The book is essentially a collection of sci-

ence fiction stories which, as is well and wittily explained in Stefan Dziemianowicz's really excellent foreword, was by no means Bloch's favorite genre and was, indeed, not one he ever pretended to really understand or feel at home with.

Bloch got into the science fiction business because as a teenager he belonged to a pleasantly nutty and by no means untalented group of local Midwestern pulpsters that called themselves the Milwaukee Fictioneers (what a t-shirt that would make!). The group included a fellow named Ray Palmer who became the editor of *Amazing*, a glorious pulp specializing in gaudy tales of interplanetary exploration and other high-tech wonders that posed as being based on real science as was supposedly then practiced by scientists.

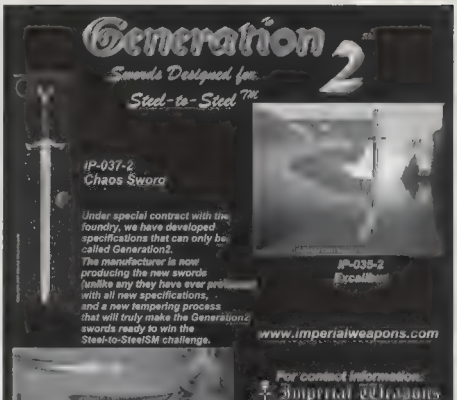
Up until then, Bloch had, because of the example and inspiration of his mentor and regular correspondent, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, only sold horror stories to *Weird Tales* and because he was by nature inclined to horror and nearly totally ignorant of—and pretty much totally disinterested in—science and technology, it never occurred to him to even try selling work in that field until Palmer pestered him into making the attempt and then went ahead and possibly stretched a point by actually buying some of the work Bob came up with.

Faulty technology is not the only thing that sets these stories of Bloch's apart from the sort of stuff that usually appeared in science fiction magazines. High flying literary authors of the stripe of H.G. Wells tended to be now and then somewhat apocalyptic, but the pulpsters basically were extremely upbeat if not giddily excited about the wonderful things scientific progress would surely bring once we got the hang of it.

Bloch, on the other hand, had a horror writer's gently dour perspective on the future and what it was likely to bring. His robots were not benign, his interplanetary wars tended to be unsuccessful, and his scientists' discoveries were by and large remarkably unfortunate notions.

But, as this book proves abundantly, a good story doesn't have to be upbeat to be entertaining. Bad robots can be fun to watch, and even wildly unsuccessful time travel can do nice things such as destroying Hitler. The bottom line is you don't have to worry about what happens in the next century, kiddo, because you'll be safely dead.

I would like to share a very nice memory I have of Robert Bloch in closing. Along with a bunch of other strange people, Bob and I were participants on a panel a magazine held on fantasy writing. At one point in the day-long interview, the reporter asked us all to make up a scary story by passing it around and round the table, each of us making up a line or two and then handing it on to the person in the next chair. The story grew more interesting with each rotation and I looked up as it approached Bob for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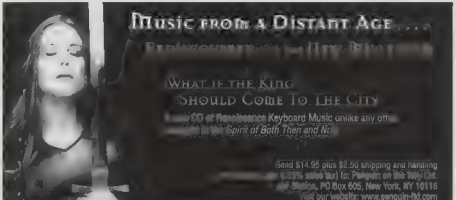
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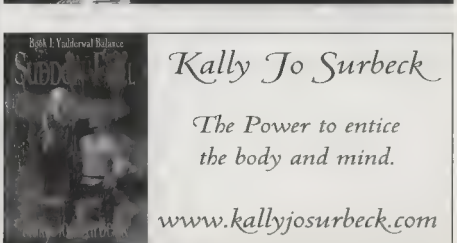
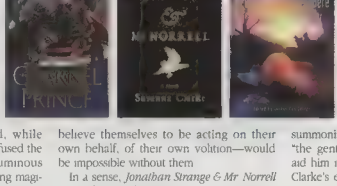


the final time and was thrilled to see strange expressions flowing across his face as he considered some horrible possibility, relished it, made it more horrible and then more horrible yet until, with a truly fiendish grin I shall always cherish and never forget, he perfected the tale's ghastly ending and gently sprang it on us

Gahan Wilson

Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell, Susanna Clarke, Bloomsbury, New York, hardcover, 800 pp., $27.95, ISBN: 1 58234-416-7

To those wondering if this gargantuan first novel can possibly live up to its immense prepublication hype, the answer is a qualified *yes.* Susanna Clarke has given us a book that may—may—prove to be as much a benchmark in the history of the genre as *Lord of the Rings* or *Little, Big.* For all their differences of style, subject, and sensibility, those two great novels have much in common. They are deeply elegiac works, concerned with the passing of magic from the world, filled with almost unbearable sadness and loss despite, or because of, the fact that their plots involve confrontation with, and triumph over, a focused, potent malevolence. Tolkien was (among other things) hearkening back with nostalgic regret to a lost and largely mythical pre-Industrial England, while Crowley (among other things) transfused the American landscape with the numinous qualities of English fairy tales, creating magical doors his characters vanished through then locked behind them. Readers close both books knowing that they themselves, and the world to which they are returning, are irredeemably stuck on the far side of a door that will not be opened again. *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell,* on the contrary, is about the *return* of magic to the world, and to England specifically. It argues forcefully for a special relationship between England (or what might be termed *Englishness*—the abstract but recognizable qualities of national character) and the fantastic. Readers who close this remarkable book—and there is at least one related novel still to come—do so with a very different understanding, namely, that magic may well invest the world more thoroughly than we know . . . or have been permitted to know.



Clarke works her literary magic with shrewdness and artistry, setting the novel during the Regency period of English history, when many aspects of the English national character were forged in the crucible of the Napoleonic wars. The book purports to be a true record of events, more history than novel, narrated by a character whose identity is never revealed but who is clearly omniscient. (This narrator is not, as some reviewers have inexplicably maintained, the minor character John Segundus, possibly it is simply the author herself, or perhaps another John, whom I will get to shortly.) Clarke gives her narrator a style whose sense and sensibility wonderfully capture the graceful and witty ironies of Jane Austen, combined with something of Dickens' inspired comedic flair. Readers will probably split over whether the liberal use of footnotes replete with facts and incidents both invented and real is a delightful enhancement or an annoying affectation; this reviewer comes down firmly in the former camp. Much of Clarke's complex and engaging back story is communicated through these footnotes, and a full understanding of what is going on in this book, behind the scenes, as it were—and make no mistake the real story of the novel takes place behind the scenes, largely invisible to the eponymous main characters, who through most of the intricate plot falsely believe themselves to be acting on their own behalf, of their own volition—would be impossible without them.

In a sense, *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* is an alternate history in that it supposes a past in which magic *was* indisputably present in England, the northern parts of which were ruled for centuries by John Uskglass, also known (among other aliases) as the Raven King. As a child he was abducted to Faerie, returned years later as a master of Fairy magic to wrest the crown of the north from the English king, then vanished inexplicably, leaving another English king as steward in his stead. With his departure, what the book terms "practical magic" ebbed from the world, until, when the book opens, in 1806, it is universally believed that there are no practical magicians left in England, or anywhere else, and that the reason for this is that the old magic spells, many of which are extant, have somehow lost their efficacy and become mere words empty of power. This belief, we soon discover, is wrong. For there is one practical magician left in England. His name is Mr. Norrell, and if there were ever a magician to which the adjective "practical" could be applied, it is he.

More of Norrell anon. First, I must stress the significant fact that, with the exception outlined above, the history that Clarke relates in these pages is identical to that recorded in our own history books. Thus, it is not quite correct to call the novel an alternate history; rather, it is *our* history, a secret history unknown to us for reasons the novel hints at, and which I expect will be made clearer in Clarke's next book, but that undoubtedly have to do with the desires of John Uskglass. At least, I hope Clarke resolves this question. If she does not, then this extraordinarily rich and accomplished novel will prove to be marred by an imaginative flaw. But that judgment cannot yet be made, and Clarke surely deserves the benefit of the doubt for now.

Mr. Norrell is aptly described in the text as "a miser who hoarded magic instead of gold." A further peculiarity of his character is an unremitting hostility toward the romantic, mysterious figure of John Uskglass and the wild magic—wild because of its Fairy roots—he represents. Norrell seeks to make magic a wholly respectable profession, even a rather dull one. In this he is surprisingly successful—and the novel suffers somewhat accordingly—until the appearance of his pupil Jonathan Strange. Strange is Norrell's opposite: open, trusting, adventuresome, and, above all, drawn to Uskglass. That master and pupil soon quarrel will surprise no one.

Early in the novel, Norrell engages in a bit of Fairy magic himself to advance his cause, summoning a character referred to only as "the gentleman with thistle-down hair" to aid him in returning a dead woman to life. Clarke's evocation of this potent Fairy king, who displays either an impetuous and unreasoning malevolence or a benevolence equally dangerous, is inspired and masterful. He is in many ways the most memorable character in a novel with many memorable characters. And his role is central not only to the surface plot but to its "shadow" plot, which seems to be the story of a struggle pitting the gentleman with the thistle-down hair against no less an adversary than the Raven King himself, one that has been going on for centuries and is only now reaching its climax. It is this conflict that seems to be the true engine driving the novel, although, as noted, it rarely surfaces into clear view but must be deduced from indirect evidence.

The capricious fancies of the gentleman with the thistle-down hair wreak havoc in the lives of every character, but most especially Lady Pole, the woman Norrell brings back to life. The Fairy steals Lady Pole away each night as part of his bargain with the unscrupulous magician, a "Negro" servant, Stephen Black, whom he adopts as a bosom companion, promising to elevate him to kingship, and Arabella Strange, the wife of Jonathan Strange, whom he abducts entirely. Clarke's depiction of the lives of these enchanted unfortunates, condemned to an endless round of forced and frivolous gaiety

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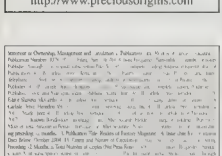

and cruelty, is one of the best things in the novel the surreal existence of Black, especially, is set forth in all its whimsical humor and, ultimately, dreadful horror.

A third magician, a disreputable street charlatan called Vinculus, whose body is covered with elaborate tattoos that possess a significance even the dimmest of readers is apt to figure out long before Norrell or Strange, plays a central role, delivering a prophecy that tells, among other things, how "Two magicians shall appear in England" and "A nameless slave shall be a king in a strange country." As this prophecy comes to fruition in unexpected ways (as the traditional fairy tale form requires), the surface and shadow plots of the novel converge.

Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell is replete with sparkling wit, delightful anecdotes, breathtaking set pieces of historic battles, including Waterloo, and the kind of imaginative strangeness and weirdness that are the unmistakable signs of genuine originality, even genius.

The Charnel Prince, Greg Keyes, Del Rey, New York, hardcover, $60 pp., $23.95, ISBN 0-345-44067-6

Greg Keyes' *The Briar King*, the first volume in the Kingdoms of Thorn and Bone tetralogy, was one of my favorite heroic fantasies of 2003. Volume II, *The Charnel Prince*, by and large maintains the high standards of its predecessor.

The Charnel Prince is very much a "middle" book, concerned with setting the stage for climactic events to come. Even so, there is adventure and intrigue, swordplay and dark sorcery aplenty in these pages, as the various characters move toward their destinies. The action commences immediately after the events of *The Briar King*. The mysterious entity known by that name has appeared in the kingdom of Crotheny, seemingly in fulfillment of an ancient prophecy or curse and heralding doom for humanity. The Church entrusts a deadly magic arrow to the king's holter, Aspar White, and sends him after the monster, accompanied by his lover, Winna, and the young monk Stephen Dange. Meanwhile, the queen of Crotheny, Muriele, her husband and family murdered, rules in the name of her idiot son, her tenuous grasp on power threatened on one side by a corrupt Church and on the other by an ambitious nobility. Muriele's other surviving child, her daughter Anne, has escaped an attempt on her life and, ignorant of the deaths of her father and sisters, is struggling to elude assassins and return to Crotheny, aided by a flashy young swordsman, Cazio. Dispatched to find her and bring her safely home is the queen's young bodyguard, Sir Neil MeqVren.

As events unfold, Aspar begins to suspect the Church's motives in sending him on his mission, and he comes to doubt as well the wisdom of killing the Briar King. Sir Neil's quest will put his beliefs and loyalties to the test. Muriele's rule will be challenged by the unexpected appearance of her husband's murderer, a man whose very existence is a stark impossibility. But the heart of *The Charnel Prince* is Anne's painful journey from spoiled girl to responsible young woman, a princess who accepts her royal role and the burdens of responsibility that come with it. The heaviest of these, the most difficult to credit and accept, is her central importance in whatever mystic drama is playing out, for Anne may very well be all that stands between the Briar King and humanity's extinction.

In Lands That Never Were: Tales of Swords and Sorcery from *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, edited by Gordon Van Gelder. Thunder's Mouth Press, New York, trade paperback, 395 pp., $15.95, ISBN 1-56858-314-1

Of the twelve stories in this fine collection from the pages of our rival publication, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, nine originally appeared in the 1990s or later. The book is not a comprehensive historical overview of sword and sorcery, it is more a snapshot of the genre today and, perhaps incidentally, a ringing endorsement of one writer's continuing centrality to it. (It is also an affirmation of *F&SF*'s centrality.)

No one can dispute Robert E. Howard's importance, but to read his work today is to encounter a powerful voice from a bygone era. Still, if only for historical purposes, a story by Howard would have made a fitting opener here. Lacking one, editor Gordon Van Gelder turned to "The Hall of the Dead," a posthumous "collaboration" between Howard and L. Sprague De Camp. Like all De Camp's misguided efforts along these lines, the story succeeds only in showcasing the myriad ways in which he is Howard's inferior.

Fortunately, this is Van Gelder's sole misstep. The heart and soul of the collection is Fritz Lieber's 1970 classic, "Ill Met in Lankhmar," featuring his signature sword and sorcery team of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. A writer of considerable sophistication, as well as a dazzling stylist, Lieber, while himself deeply influenced by Howard, remains relevant to sword and sorcery in ways that Howard does not, and his enduring influence is illustrated repeatedly in Van Gelder's selections. Charles Coleman Finlay's "After the Gaud Chrysalis," Ellen Kushner's "The Swordsman Whose Name Was Not Death," and Chris Willrich's "King Rainjoy's Tears" feature dual protagonists, elegant writing, complex relationships, and an expertly nuanced use of irony to underscore the human dimension of the fantastic, all hallmarks of Lieber's work. Even tales like Phyllis Eisenstein's "The Island in the Lake" and Pat Murphy's "Dragon's Gate," which depart from the Fafhrd and Gray Mouser model, show a debt to Lieber.

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RETURNING MY SISTER'S FACE

Honor is a precious thing,
and an awful thing to lose.
But to have it stolen
is a fate worse than death.

By Eugie Foster

And it was Oiwa's proud smile I looked for when I won the praise of my sword master. I remember how small she looked, kneeling in her kimono with her hands folded in her lap. But she was always my big sister, even when I towered over her in my samurai armor.

Our father died when I was a boy, felled by the sword of a barbarian from the west. He was a brave warlord. I barely remember him. Oiwa told me how he laughed when he swung me in his arms, proud of how fearless I was as a babe.

With his death, our prosperity ended. Mother grew sick, and people turned away from us, loathe to help those who had so obviously been touched by bad luck, as though it might be contagious. We would have become thieves or beggars if not for Shigekazu—the lord of Yotsuya. He took pity on us and took me in, gave me a swordsman's education, and let us stay in our ancestral home.

To repay him, when I earned my warrior's katana, I became his most loyal captain. I patrolled his borders and kept bandits from abusing his farmers and tradesmen.

It was the start of plum blossom season during my seventeenth year when Iyemon arrived. The white and fuchsia petals shed their heavy perfume, and there was anticipation of the upcoming *Ume Matsuri* festival. Iyemon rode to Lord Shigekazu's gate, a masterless samurai, shining in his fine *michiyuki* overcoat, astride a golden stallion. He brought with him his katana and his servant, Kohei, and nothing else.

He went to Shigekazu and petitioned to be allowed to join his guard. In turn, my lord Shigekazu asked me to look after him.

It was strange for me, as Iyemon was a well-grown man, ten years my senior. Yet, I was in the teacher's position. Even so, Iyemon was gracious. He did not chafe when I instructed him as to how we set our watches and shifts, nor did he sneer to spar at bamboo canes with me. Indeed he laughed when I bested him in our first bout, and was as genial in triumph in our second.

He had no kin in the area and no hearth, so I invited him to dinner.

Oiwa was surprised to see three men—Iyemon, Kohei, and myself—walking up the path, but she was sweetly courteous, as I knew she would be. She ran to put more water on for tea and returned with a basin of scented water for us to splash upon our hands and faces.

If I try, I can still remember the flavors from that dinner. Hot soup with tangy seaweed, sticky rice that melted on my tongue, tart *umeboshi* from the plum trees, and sweet bean cakes that could have been clouds of nectar fallen from the heavens.

After the meal, Kohei washed the pots and bowls while Oiwa went to tend our mother. Iyemon and I sat on *tatami* mats and smoked pipes, awash in tranquil harmony.

With the blue smoke wreathing his face, Iyemon cast his eyes down. "Tell me, Yasuo," he said. "Why is your beautiful sister without a husband?"

I was surprised at how forthright he was on this matter of delicacy, but then he was new to Yotsuya and did not know our family's story.

"None will take her," I said. "For though Oiwa is noble, she can bring no dowry to a marriage. Our father died with his riches plundered. What household wealth we had we spent on medicine and doctors for our mother, who languishes with a wasting disease."

"But you have this fine house in the country."

"We owe all to Lord Shigekazu. Without his mercy and generosity, we would be penniless, cast out into the streets."

"But still, your sister is sweet of face and graceful of temperament. Surely there are men who would take her to wife?"

"She is considered a bad luck woman." I admitted. "She has no suitors."

"Outrageous!" Iyemon declared. Of course, I was not going to disagree.

When Oiwa came from our mother's room, Iyemon rose to his feet and bowed low to her. A soft blush, like the new glow of camellia blossoms on a white bough, filled her face, and she hid behind her fan.

"Lady Oiwa," Iyemon said, "I would be honored if you would walk with me at the *Ume Matsuri* festival. May I call upon you tomorrow?"

My sister's blush deepened, turning the enchanting hue of sunset clouds at midsummer. "I will look forward to it."

A SOFT BLUSH, LIKE THE NEW GLOW OF CAMELLIA BLOSSOMS ON A WHITE BOUGH, FILLED HER FACE, AND SHE HID BEHIND HER FAN.

The *Ume Matsuri* festival was the traditional start of spring. The plum trees displayed their five-petalled blooms during the month of *Yayoi*, while beneath them, maidens and youths strolled together. The maidens wore kimonos to rival the flowers—violet silk embroidered with golden bamboo shoots, apricot sleeves with scarlet chrysanthemum, sea foam brocade with glowing koi painted on them. And the young men wore the maidens like banners upon their arms.

Oiwa did not have much finery, as we had sold her most lavish kimonos long ago. But she had kept one kimono, our great-great grandmother's good luck silk. It was peacock blue brocade with silver pine trees and malachite maple leaves woven through the cloth. With her hair piled high on her head and wooden *geta* sandals on her feet, Oiwa looked like a princess.

Iyemon's eyes widened when he saw her. He bore with him a perfect white plum blossom for her hair, and she let him affix it in her gleaming locks. They walked arm-and-arm together among the plum trees.

Iyemon became a frequent caller, and as the first cherry blossoms began to bud, they announced their *Yui-no* betrothal. Since there was but meager wealth on both sides, the gifts they exchanged were, of necessity, modest. Iyemon gave my sister a white *obi* to use as a belt on her wedding kimono. It was fine silk, embroidered with snow-white phoenixes. In return, Oiwa gave her husband-to-be a black *hakama* she had sewn with her own hands, every stitch a prayer of loyalty and fidelity.

At the wedding ceremony, Oiwa was radiant as the dawn star as she glided through the humble Shinto shrine of our ancestors. We had hired a maid from town to dress her hair with rented *kanzashi* combs and to help her don the traditional *shiro-makuo* kimono.

Iyemon was composed, an expression of serenity on his face as he spoke the commitment vows. He looked like a king in his newly made *hakama* robe. Oiwa's hand was steady, without a whisper of tremor, when she lit the customary lamps.

But barely had the taste of the wedding *sake* faded when trouble visited. Our mother, too weak even to attend the ceremony, worsened. We thought death was ready to harvest her, yet she clung

with grim tenacity to this world. The newlywed's month of sweetness was cut short, barely begun.

Then Lord Shigekazu received word that Lady Uma, his granddaughter, would be traveling from the city of Edo to visit him on her quest to find a husband. As he had not seen the daughter of his daughter in many years, he was jubilant at the news. He asked me to take a regiment of men to meet her at his border. For the first time, I was loathe to do his bidding.

"Please, Lord Shigekazu," I said. "My mother is very ill. I would prefer to stay near. Will you give me leave to decline this obligation?"

"Obligation?" Lord Shigekazu demanded. "Is it not basic courtesy that the captain I have raised as a grandson should feel honor-bound to protect the safety of my only granddaughter? What if there are bandits on the road? Come, Yasuo, your mother has had many a bad turn, surely she will last a fortnight longer?"

Please, my lord, it is my least desire to defy you, but I also owe duty to she who bore me."

Lord Shigekazu might have said harsher words then, ones that would have made me lose face if I did not bow to his wishes, but Iyemon intervened.

"If my lord would be willing to indulge one so new to his service," he said. "I would be greatly privileged if I could take my brother's place as escort for the Lady Uma."

Lord Shigekazu's brow still creased with darkness, but he allowed the substitution as Iyemon was now my kin, and to refuse him would disgrace both of us. And so the next morning, Iyemon took his golden stallion and a regiment of my most trusted men to the Yotsuya borders.

There was a great storm that night. Rain clattered against the wooden shutters and the fierce wind tupped and twirled the lanterns so their light cast stark shadows and dancing silhouettes. Oiwa and I kneeled by our mother's *tatami* mat, holding her hand and taking turns fanning her brow. She complained of a burning thirst, but her throat was too ragged to swallow the weak tea Oiwa brewed.

Mother's mind flitted like a bird between this world and the next. She rarely knew us, babbling instead as though we were spirits and ancestors long dead. I knew she would leave us soon. They say if someone sees their ancestors in a fever dream, it is not long before they will go to join them.

Oiwa continued to fight against the inexorable. "Mama," she whispered. "Mama, try to drink a little of this green tea. It will cool you."

Mother sat bolt upright and stared at Oiwa. "Where is your face?" she cried.

Oiwa reached a hand to her cheek. "I—It is at the front of my head, where it always is."

"No, only half of it," Mother replied. She glared at me. "I pledge you to return the other half of your sister's face. Swear it, Yasuo!"

Oiwa and I exchanged troubled looks. I do not swear oaths lightly, so I hesitated to promise to some fantasy of fever. But our mother was insistent.

"Swear it, or I will haunt you after I die! Swear!"

Oiwa leaned to me. "There is no harm in giving your word to something that requires no deed. Do not let her final words be a curse."

So I bowed my head over our mother's hand and promised to return Oiwa's missing half-face. I was uneasy, but truthfully, what harm was there in such a promise?

The next thunderbolt brought a sudden gale into the room, crashing open the shutter and blowing out the oil lamp. When we had relit it, our mother was gone, extinguished with the lamp, and unlike it, forever dark.

My sister's ragged sobs filled the room as she clutched our mother's body to her breast. I bowed my head.

Lord Shigekazu's anger with me was somewhat assuaged by the news of Mother's death. Still, I knew he harbored resentment. After her cremation ceremony, he insisted I return to the soldier's barracks.

Though Oiwa was pale and weak with grief, she urged me to go.

"We must not lose Shigekazu's favor," she said. "We owe him a debt we will never be able to repay."

I knew in a mere fortnight Iyemon would return, so I packed my saddlebags and kissed her farewell.

I dined at home when I could: escape for an evening so Oiwa would not be alone. She was always glad to see me, but grief haunted her eyes, and where once her cheeks were blushing peaches, they had begun to sink and grow sallow. I saw a strand of white in her lustrous hair, and it saddened me. Oiwa had spent her youth tending our mother. Now her joy had flown with Mother's death. I prayed that Iyemon's devoted attentions would be able to restore her joy, if not her youth.

As though in answer to my prayers, the gods delivered Iyemon at last. And like a sunrise, with him came the Lady Uma. Having spent time in the royal courts, she was like a jeweled butterfly among moths. She wore layers of fine, silk kimonos, twelve of them together, with the sleeve cuffs and collars cut to display each distinctive color—lilac, damson, azure, indigo, emerald, topaz, citrine, garnet, peach, scarlet, magenta, and finally at the last, creamy white—and each one embroidered with a different design in gold thread.

It seemed all the unmarried men in Yotsuya found themselves captivated by the flashing hems of Lady Uma's kimonos and the elusive perfume she wore—jasmine and crushed lily. I, along with half my men, wrote sonnets of love and admiration to her.

But then, more misfortune. Word came of raiders from the west, great men with shaggy faces and beastly apparel, plundering the countryside. I was assigned the duty of quashing their incursion before it became an invasion.

It was with a mournful heart that I left Lady Uma's presence, but I did not dare to protest. I was already low man.

The barbarians were vicious and tenacious. They had set up a rude fortification on the edge of Yotsuya. I knew if I did not dispense them, they would foray deeper in, burning villages and razing fertile farmlands. I organized my men for a siege.

The month of rice planting, *UTsuki*, passed, then the month of rice sprouting, *SaTsuki*. Summer lapsed in a blur of sun and waiting. My soldiers took turns fishing the waters and hunting the forest for our meals. We cooked upwind of the barbarians to torment them with the smell of fresh fish and sweet rice while they were reduced to hard loaves and dry meat.

It was my turn with net and rod. The water laved cool around my knees and I grew lost in thoughts of the perfection of Lady Uma's face with its dusting of rice powder. A great tug on my line nearly pulled me over. I called my men to help bring in the grandfather fish.

We soon saw it was not a fish tangled in my line. It was a most terrible article I had caught—two bodies, nailed to either side of a black door, the prescribed punishment for convicted adulterers. They were purple and bloated. Her face in particular was most terrible to look upon. Half of it seemed to have melted away as though it were wax beside a fire.

I swept away the debris of riverweed from the grisly plank. The woman was wrapped in a peacock blue kimono, the silk ruined by the water. I could make out the memory of silver pine trees and dark green maple leaves outlined on the brocade.

It was Oiwa's festival kimono. Oh, my sister! And sharing her door of disgrace was Iyemon's servant, Kohei. I recognized his face and the *yukata* robe he wore.

I do not know what I screamed then—a curse on my sister, or on the gods, or on myself. I bolted from that place, flung myself upon my stallion, and galloped away.

I rode through rain and sun and night until my steed collapsed beneath me. Then I ran. When my armor and helmet weighed me down, I tossed them aside. I kept only the clothes on my back and

my katana, for I would need it to spill the cursed blood from my veins at the altar of my ancestors

It was night when I stumbled through the gardens of my ancestral home and up the steps of our shrine. I ignited four sticks of incense and lit four candles, the number for death and misfortune. Around me, the icons of the most revered ancestors of my lineage—dukes and warlords and virtuous ladies—watched as I removed my soiled and tattered shirt. I felt their eyes as I knelt and drew my katana.

"Yasuo, do not cry, silly boy." Oiwa stood in the shadow of a bamboo screen, holding a fan over her face. I leaped to my feet, ready to embrace her. But when she came closer, I saw by the light of the four candles that Oiwa had no legs. Where in the darkness I had thought them concealed by night, in the circle of candleshine, I saw she trailed away to a wisp of translucence.

"Oiwa," I whispered, "what has befallen you?"

"Remember the oath you made to our mother?"

"Y—yes."

"I call upon you to honor it." She dropped her fan. What had been dreadful on her poor body, on her visage as a *yurei*, an angry ghost, was even more terrible. One side of her face was sweet and whole, the other melted away. One eye rolled in its socket, yellow and diseased. A crust of tears tracked from it down her sagging cheek. Her once-opulent hair was lank and thin, dirty strands hanging from her torn scalp. Half her mouth was curled down, black and putrid, a wad of spittle hovering at the edge. And the skin on that cheek and that side of her brow was gray and curdled.

I shrieked in horror, and there was only blackness.

I woke in the shrine, the four candles burned away, and the cloying scent of incense hovering in a cloud. Iyemon supported me, dragged me to my feet.

"I thought the voices in the garden were cats fighting or the shriek of night birds," he said. "If I had known you had returned, my brother, I would have run to your side."

"I was fishing," I mumbled, on the edge of delirium. "There was a door. Oiwa and Kohei." I remembered terrible images of Oiwa, her face dripping and her blackened mouth, but no, that was how I saw her on the door, surely?

"That is not how I would have had you learn of it. Come inside. I will tell the sorry tale."

Within, Iyemon poured me a bowl of plum wine which I drank in two gulps. He poured another that I clutched in trembling fingers.

"It was my fault," Iyemon said. "If I had not volunteered to escort Lady Uma to her grandfather's house, perhaps Oiwa would not have gone mad with loneliness."

"What are you saying?"

"I found them together. Oiwa drank poison, some mixture of the garden—suicide. I treated Kohei to the blade of my katana."

"My sister was an honorable woman!"

"I would not have revealed their sin, truly, but—"

"Liar!" I shrieked. "Get out of my house!"

His face, so beseeching a moment before, hardened. "Yasuo, this is now *my* house. Your mother bequeathed it to Oiwa, and as her husband, I am her beneficiary."

The half full bowl of wine shattered on the floor. "You are throwing me out?"

Immediately, he was the picture of solicitude. "No, no. Never. I do not blame you for your sister's wantonness. But you must face the truth."

I sank to my knees, sobbing like a child, calling to Oiwa. Iyemon left me alone to preserve what little honor I could still lay claim to.

In the subsequent days, I refused to leave the house, and Iyemon let me brood and weep as I would. He also left me casks of plum wine and bags of opium to ease my grief. Welcoming the blunting of memory, I drank and smoked my days away.

It was during one of these opium-muddled twilights that Oiwa returned.

The peacock blue silk of her kimono was stained by river water, but she protected me from the worst of her terrible appearance. She held a paper fan across the sinister half of her face.

"My face is still half missing," she said.

I scrambled away, cowering in a corner of the room. "What face do you want to recover?" I whimpered. "Your honor or your beauty?"

"Ah, little brother, you have come to the crux of it. Know this, while you have sunk yourself in wine and opium, the nuptial plans rush forward. I will return on their wedding night. Look for me then. See to it my face is restored that night, or I will haunt you forever."

"Oiwa, I'm so sorry."

Her voice softened. "Do not cry, little brother. I have shed enough tears for us both."

Then she was gone, and all the opium cobwebs swept from my mind with her.

It was dark, the sun long fled beneath the horizon. I crept from my chambers, disheveled and bleary. Voices drifted from the sitting room, two men at dinner. I clung to the shadows and listened.

"It was a fortuitous day when you came to Yotsuya." It was Lord Shigekazu.

"I am honored that you say it, my lord," Iyemon replied.

"Come now, surely you can call me 'grandfather'?"

"I would not wish for unseemly haste."

"Tut. Your *Yui-no* to my granddaughter can be announced soon enough. It is well you discovered your wife, that slattern's betrayal, and dealt with her and your servant so decisively. Otherwise the smear on your reputation—"

I did not breathe while I struggled to make sense of their words. Shigekazu as Iyemon's *grandfather*? Iyemon engaged to Lady Uma?

It was the first revelation. The second came after their words penetrated further. Shigekazu had said *dealt with her*, meaning Oiwa. Iyemon had told me my sister had taken poison— dishonorable suicide. But now it seemed more likely Iyemon had dispatched her himself.

A lie. It is well known that falsehoods come in threes. This was the second lie, the first being that Oiwa had been unfaithful. But the third lie I did not yet know.

I slunk back to my chambers. While I poured the last of the wine onto the thirsty rocks outside (for I did not wish to be tempted by the seduction of euphoric forgetfulness), I mused over the question. I was about to scatter the opium to the winds when I paused.

I put on fresh clothing—a short *haori* jacket and *hakama* pants—as befitting a lowly servant. Stealing Iyemon's golden stallion from the stable, I rode to Lord Shigekazu's pavilion.

There, I slipped through the watch corridors and guard niches I knew so well from my time as Shigekazu's captain, until I came to Lady Uma's chambers.

By the light of a muted lamp, I set a porcelain plate by her head and set fire to the opium until a deep, sweet smoke filled the room. In order to keep my own head clear, I wrapped my face with the silk sleeve of one of Uma's kimonos. It also muffled my mouth and thereby my voice, which further served my purposes.

When I was sure she was deep in the opium's thrall, I spoke.

"Uma, Uma," I intoned. "This is your ancestral *kami*, your family's spirit of fertility. If you wish to bear sons, you must honor me."

Uma mumbled and stirred.

"Speak up, Uma. I cannot hear you," I sang.

"What do you want?" Her speech was sluggish. "Let me sleep."

"If you wish for your union to Iyemon to be blessed with sons, you must answer my questions so I can cast your horoscope."

This seemed to pique her interest. "How many sons will I have?" she murmured.

"As many sons as the fortunates of your courtship."

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"That is good. We will have many sons."

"Was your courtship so long?"

She laughed, her throat sultry. "He courted me as soon as he saw me on my palfrey, on the very border of Yotsuya."

"As your escort?"

"Even then."

"Was he not married?"

"I suppose so, but it is common knowledge in the Emperor's court that wives are but a passing inconvenience."

Such a place of depravity the Emperor's house must be. "Did you plot with Iyemon to loosen this inconvenience?"

"A noblewoman does not dirty herself with such details. But when his wife and his servant were found forming the double-backed demon, well, I was hardly surprised."

It was enough. I had discovered the third lie. It was Uma herself. Where Oiwa had been pure and innocent, Uma was corrupt and evil. My fingers trembled to wrap around her traitorous throat. I loomed over her, but then I felt an icy touch at my shoulder.

I glanced back, almost upsetting the lamp when I saw Oiwa's *yurei*. Thankfully, she continued to shield her face with her fan, although her single clear eye was baleful.

"In order to bear sons," she said, in imitation of my *kami* voice, "you must marry Iyemon tomorrow."

"We have only just announced our intention to marry to Grandfather today."

"Regardless, you must marry tomorrow or you will be barren forever."

I stared at Oiwa. What was she about?

"Do you understand me, Uma?" she demanded. "You must marry tomorrow!"

"I will, *kami*. I will."

"Do not forget." This last she directed at me, but Uma, with her eyes shut, did not notice the difference.

Oiwa's fan fluttered, an unspoken threat, and she dissolved into the night.

Trembling like a wind-wracked pine tree, I smothered the still-smoldering opium and blew it cool before pouring ashes and plate into the pocket of my *haori* jacket. I made sure to light incense to mask the scent as I skulked out of Uma's room. Making as much haste as I dared, I darted to where I had stashed Iyemon's stallion, and rode him full out, all the way back.

I had him re-stabled, my clean clothes shucked, and the ashes of the opium smeared in my hair while Iyemon and Shigekazu lingered over *sake*. After Shigekazu returned to his pavilion, Iyemon came to my quarters with a jar of wine, which I dutifully drank.

The next morning, Iyemon trotted me out. A man from the town came to shave and dress us. Through this purification, Iyemon continued to ply me with wine. I drank enough to keep my hand steady and my resolve strong, but poured two bowls out for every one I drank.

Iyemon dressed in the black *hakama* Oiwa had given him, a travesty of my sister's devotion.

"Why the finery?" I asked, speaking the words as though through half-numbed lips.

"I am to become engaged to the Lady Uma," Iyemon replied. "As you are my brother, I think you should know before the public announcement. I would prefer to stay single, for my heart lies yet with Oiwa, but Lord Shigekazu insisted. He thought good fortune could be restored to his house by a prosperous match."

The lies tripped so easily off his tongue. "I don't begrudge you happiness, my brother." I giggled like a courtesan, high-pitched and merry, and pretended not to see the look of disgust on my "brother's" face.

When the guests arrived, I played the drunkard for them all, spilling tea and *sake*, and tripping over my own feet.

Shigekazu, especially, was revolted by me. After I groped one of Uma's maidens, he grabbed me and dragged me from the house. It was what I had hoped he would do.

Dropping my dissembling act, I bowed low.

"My lord, I hope you will forgive my display. I needed to speak to you in private."

He was surprised at my sudden lucid speech, but he was not inclined to hear me. He twisted away.

"Wait! My ancestors have warned me. They have given me two things to share with you. If you recognize the signs, will you humor me?"

He turned back, suspicion and distaste marking lines in his brow. I handed him the plate from his granddaughter's room.

"Why, this is the expensive plate I gave Uma when she arrived. How did you—?"

"Lady Uma will insist that the wedding be held today," I said. "She will not be swayed. This too my ancestors divulged to me. Will you hear me?"

"If Uma insists upon marrying Iyemon today, which I know she will not, then yes, I will."

How Shigekazu's eyes bulged when Uma announced she wished to go to the temple that very day to wed Iyemon. No words could change her mind, and so their *Yui-no* engagement became their wedding party.

And that is how I pressed lord Shigekazu into accompanying me in hiding behind a bamboo screen in their wedding chambers. His patience with me was at its limits, though. It was the height of impropriety for us to be there, but when the bride in her *tsuno kakushi* veil stepped into the room, her face concealed, he was as silent as I could have wished.

Behind her, Iyemon followed, and together they lit the ceremonial lamps.

"Why such haste, my blossom?" Iyemon said. "It goes against the plan we made and looks improper."

"Do you not burn for me after all, my husband?" Through the veil, Uma's voice was muffled and strange. My blood turned chill and slow. It was not Uma's voice at all. I had heard that cadence, that tone every day as a boy, singing and talking and shouting. I would know it in my sleep. It was Oiwa.

My plan had been to force a confession from Iyemon and Uma at blade-point, witnessed by Shigekazu. My sister's *yurei* had other intentions.

Iyemon wrapped his arms around his bride. "How could you ask such a thing?"

"I just wonder if you truly wished to marry me. Were your words of promise lies? Did you instead plan to stay with your wife, Oiwa?"

"Oiwa? That bad luck slut?" Iyemon stepped back. "How could you think that?"

"Perhaps you did not intend for Oiwa to betray you, and were put out by it?"

He caught one of her lily hands. "Come, if it will make you believe my love for you, I will tell you the truth of Oiwa's fate."

"Oiwa did not betray me. She was utterly devoted to me, the simpering cow. You were jealous of her face, you said. She was so sickly after the death of her mother. It was easy to pour poison into her tea. I did it while she watched, calling it medicine. She took it from my hands with such trust. Didn't you hear how the poison I chose disfigured her? Would I have delivered such a caustic potion to anyone I loved?"

"Tell me the symptoms of the poison." Her voice turned harsh. Could Iyemon not hear it?

"It made her ugly, for your enjoyment, my love. It made her hair fall out in great clumps."

The figure of Uma reached under the *tsuno kakushi* and shed a handful of long, black hair with dried blood at their roots.

"What else?"

"Uma, what—?"

"What else!"

Continued on page 90

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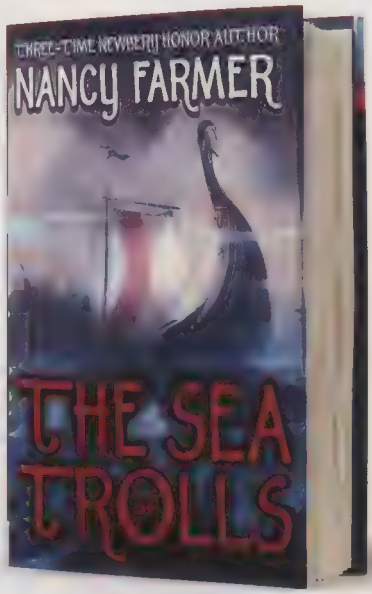

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ALL FISH AND DRACULA

You might think you know what haunts the streets of Samhain. You might be right and you might be very wrong.

The girl slipped across the cobbles, black lace trailing over rain wet stone. The two women were walking a short distance ahead, elderly, bowed down with shopping bags, headscarves keeping out the worst of the October drizzle. In one bag, the girl could see the wet, golden skin of an escaping onion. The women were talking together in low voices, the soft Yorkshire accent running the words together.

She shied from the threat of her reflection in a shop window, bouncing back the lights above the rows of jet jewelery. She already knew what she looked like: all lace and velvet beneath the billowing leather coat, lips the color of what-else, hair slicked back from a high, pale forehead. Her hands clicked with silver.

As she drew closer to the two women, she thought *It would be so easy.* But then she spied the others at the end of the street: her vampire clan. She hurried toward them.

As she passed the old women, she wondered how she must appear: alarming, sinister, a vision out of dark. She smiled to herself, a little. She was a few yards in front of them when one of the women spoke.

"Ee, Mary," she said. "Isn't it nice to see so many young people taking care of their clothes?"

Illustration by Michael Kerr

"WHITBY WELCOMES THE GOTHS"

The banner was huge, taking up most of an advertising hoarding at the entrance to the main street. Around the letters, someone had painted bats with little smiling faces

"Look at that," Lily said, disgusted But it made Katya smile Julian twisted around in his seat to look at them, flicking back a black lock of hair

"What, you were expecting them to meet us with pitchforks and stakes? They love Goth Weekend up here. No one getting pissed and throwing up in their gardens. We're polite. We keep ourselves to ourselves."

"We spend loads of money," Katya murmured. She waved a jet-and-silver decked hand "What's not to love?"

"Precisely "

But Lily's mouth turned downward, like a child who would not be comforted. Katya sighed. Lily had been in a mood ever since they left Leeds and she was beginning to regret ever accepting Julian's offer of a lift up to Whitby She didn't know them very well—they were friends of a friend—and even though they were all Goths, she could not help wishing that Lily and Julian were a little less ... well, Gothic Lily sulked and pouted, and Julian had n't stopped talking since they had started, in a superior, educating-the-young kind of way. He was four years older, it was true, twenty-two to Katya's eighteen, but even so. . She supposed that he did know more about the bands, but she would rather see them for herself and make up her own mind But she was bang on about it."

She saw Julian's lip curl "It's natural to eat flesh. We're predators, hunters We need the protein."

"Beans have protein."

"You can't be a vampire and eat beans "

"I'm not a vampire, am I? I'm just a Goth."

"Anyway," Lily said, suddenly animated, "that s not cod."

Katya peered through the car window in the direction of her pointing finger. Right at the top of the cliff, by the roadside, stood a wishbone gateway, white against the storm-dark sky

"That's a whale's jawbone," Julian said

"Big, isn't it?" Katya remarked, and wished she hadn't made such an obvious remark Of course it was big; it belonged to a whale. She thought of her sister Jess, who had a job as an estate agent and read *Cosmopolitan*

"I don't know what you want to go to Whitby for at this time of the year Whitby 's boring. All fish and Dracula Why don t you book a week in Malaga?"

"Here we are " Julian pulled up at the curb

The guesthouse, set on the wind-driven cliff, had lemon-colored gables and a garden filled with withered hydrangeas. Wrestling her bags from the car, Katya signed in at the desk, watched by a small, pale woman in a fraying chenille sweater. Then, with relief, she went upstairs and shut the door behind her. She could still hear Julian's voice, lecturing on, and Lily's muttered replies, but they were staying in a room downstairs, well out of earshot, and slowly the sounds faded

Later, Katya walked down into the town through the October twilight She had crept through the hallway of the guesthouse and shut the door quietly behind her, in case Lily and Julian overheard and wanted to go with her. She felt a twinge of guilt, but stifled it

Whitby was crawling with Goths strolling through the narrow streets in spite of the chill and the rainy air Anubis Dusk and the Deadmen were playing at the Spa, and Katya slipped into the back after handing over a fiver And then she was lost for the next hour and twenty minutes, in the shadow-play of music and light.

Coming out, still dazed, into the rain, she had a moment of intense loneliness, just long enough to enjoy, because then she looked up and the others were there. The others, and Damian, thin and nervy and possibly about to become her boyfriend, Katya thought with a rush of hope

The rest of the evening was snatched up into gossip and chips and pints of snakebite in a nearby pub Katya was initially too happy to notice what the place was called, but when closing time saw them out on the street once more, she glanced upward and saw that the name of the pub was the Herring Catch Jess's remark floated back into memory and she smiled

"Walk you back?" Damian asked, and she nodded, overcome with sudden shyness They set off up the hill together Halfway up, reminding herself that she was eighteen now, a grown woman, she reached out and took his hand It was both cold and clammy, Katya did not mind They did not say very much. At the door of the guesthouse, he kissed her, rather clumsily, and then he was gone. Slowly, Katya made her way through dripping hydrangeas and up the stairs to her room. She was just easing off her boots when there was a sharp tap at the door

"It's me," Julian's voice said. He sounded younger and strained "Is Lily with you?"

"Isn't she with you?" Katya did not want to let him in. She wanted to sit down on the bed and think about Damian

"No. Can I come in?"

Katya stood in indecision for a moment, then opened the door.

The girl was crying. Her hands were sticky with blood.

too polite, or too *something*, to say so

"Where's the guest house?" she asked, longing now for the journey to be at an end so that she could go and find Damian and the others. As they turned the corner, she saw a huge group of young men, all frock coats and knee boots She wondered, with an odd stab of disloyalty, how many of them might be called Damian Or Julian, come to that. Or Katy, with an extra "a."

"Not far now," Julian said, quite kindly, as if reassuring someone very small.

"Oh good."

She spoke more sourly than she had intended, and Lily gave her a glance of surprise, as though she were the one to have a monopoly on sulleness.

"I'll drop you two off and park," Julian said They were climbing now, high into the town. Craning back, Katya saw a thin line of estuary through the rainy haze, banked by black harbor walls. The town stepped down to meet it and beyond lay the chilly expanse of the North Sea. A boat, tiny from this height, was setting out from the harbor mouth

"Herring " Julian said, with authority

"I'm sorry?"

"That's what they fish for here," Julian amplified. "And cod "

"I thought cod was all fished out?" Katya ventured She wasn't sure about herring, either. Julian frowned, clearly preferring not to be questioned.

"Is it?"

"Yes. Everything was overfished up here There s barely anything left in the North Sea."

"Well, that shouldn't matter much to you, should it? As long as they don't run out of nut roast."

"Don't you even eat fish?" Lily asked

"No," Katya said "I'm not that sort of vegetarian I've never eaten fish or meat. I'm vegan, actually My mum's a bit of an old hippy. She brought us up that way. It's just the way I am. I don't

Julian seemed very pale, but admittedly it was hard to tell.

"We went to the Disappointed gig at the Metropole. I turned around and she was gone. I've been looking for her ever since."

"I haven't seen her since we got here."

"Where did you go, anyway?" He sounded petulant and accusing.

Katya told him. "She'll probably be back in a bit. I wouldn't worry, honestly."

He seemed inclined to linger, but Katya was too tired. She herded him out the door and fell into bed.

Next morning, to Katya's relief, Julian was not at breakfast. Somewhat guiltily, she ploughed her way through mushrooms and toast, and examined a flyer for the Bat Conservation Raffle, just in case one of the other residents felt the need to talk to her. No one did. She returned to her room to fetch her coat. Beyond the windows, the sky was a deep, lowering gray.

As she reached the front door, however, her cell phone rang. The number shown was Julian's. Katya hesitated, then answered it.

"It's me," Julian said, without preamble. "I'm at the police station."

"Why?" Katya asked, blankly. "What have you done?"

"I haven't done anything!" He sounded rattled. The usual slight, superior drawl was absent. "They found Lily last night. She's dead."

"Dead?" Katya turned to see her own face looking back at her from the hall mirror. In the underwater dimness of the hallway, her face looked pallid and drowned beneath the heavy makeup. She could see each one of the kohl dots around her eyes, in perfect, unnatural clarity.

"Katya? Are you there?"

"Something bit me."

"Yes?" It sounded more like a question. "What happened?" The streets had been so slippery, and in high heels ... Or perhaps a car.

"Was she . . . run over, or something?"

"She was killed."

"Someone killed her?" His voice seemed to be coming from a very long way away. "They said I can go. I was with people all evening."

She wondered why he was telling her this, then realized that of course he would be a suspect, if Lily had been murdered.

"Katya? Can you come to the police station? I don't want to be on my own."

She had to be strong and decisive. "Tell me where it is," she said. Her voice sounded more like a squeak.

Under the neon glow of the station reception, Julian looked even more wan than usual, and scared. He was twisting his long black scarf between his hands.

"Let's get out of here," Katya said. She took his arm and steered him through the doors.

"They might want to talk to you, too. I don't know."

"Did you give them my name?" Katya said.

"I had to." He shot her an uneasy look. "They kept asking if there was anyone else who knew Lily."

"Do they know how she died?" It seemed so unreal, to be having this conversation. It wasn't like this in books, this floating, shocky sensation.

"They said there were marks on her neck. But she hadn't been—you know."

"That means strangling," Katya said in a very small voice.

He glanced at her askance. "Or a bite."

Katya let go of his arm and stared. "A bite? From what?"

He didn't answer. They gaped at one another for a few moments, then Julian turned, abruptly, and began walking slowly down the hill.

The police called Katya once she and Julian had reached a tea shop. It was full of Goths and old ladies, mutually ignoring one another save for a few occasional remarks about the rain. Katya made Julian eat a scone. When her phone rang, she nearly dropped it.

They wanted her to come in as soon as she could.

"I can't come back with you," Julian said, staring mutinously out of the window. "I just can't cope with it."

"But I don't want to go on my own," Katya faltered. "And I waited for *you*."

"Well, sorry, but I can't handle it, OK?"

Angry and scared, she rang Damian and he said he would meet her at the station. He was waiting when she got there.

Katya had always thought that it would be rather cool to be questioned by the police, or involved in a murder, but now that it was happening it seemed merely prosaic, upsetting, and at the same time, strange. The room where they questioned her was dingy and smelled of damp dog. The policewoman was kind, not much older than Katya herself, and she took a painstakingly long time to write down the statement. There was no sense that Katya might be a suspect. They just wanted some details, that was all. Then she was allowed to go. She and Damian traipsed back up the hill to the guesthouse and sat in the lounge, drinking endless cups of tea. Katya had brought mint tea bags, since she did not like black tea, and the thin heat of it revived her a little.

That evening, she found herself determined to have a good time. She tried not to think about Lily. It was a horrible thing, but some small secret voice inside her told her that Lily was hard to miss.

They met up with the others at the Herring Catch. It wasn't so busy this early in the evening, and they managed to get a window seat. Katya looked out across the expanse of the harbor. The lights from the high streets of the town glittered across the water, fracturing darkness. She thought she glimpsed something moving, out there toward the harbor mouth, and frowning, she craned her neck to see, but it was gone. Perhaps it had been a fishing boat, though she found it hard to believe that anyone would set out on a night like this.

All the talk was about Lily and how she had managed to choose the most appropriate day of the year to die, really. It was Hallowe'en, after all, Samhain, when the dead come back from the other world and the veil between the realms hes thin.

"It's what she would have wanted," Damian said, in wide-eyed earnest.

"Too right," Amy remarked, sourly. "A great big melodrama."

"That's not very kind," Damian protested.

"No, but it's true." Amy glared around her. "Isn't it?" No one said anything.

The sudden tension, on top of the other events of the day, made Katya uncomfortable.

"Won't be a moment," she muttered, and rose from the table. "Where's the ladies?"

"It's out the back," Amy said, still glaring. Katya made her way through the back door of the pub and found herself in a court yard: three bare brick walls and a fourth containing a half open door. Through it, she glimpsed the black waters of the harbor. And again, there was movement across the water: something gliding. Something big. Katya frowned, trying to make sense of it. She could not help but think of bats. She realized that she was shivering. It was freezing, out here in the courtyard. She wrapped her lace-and-velvet arms around herself and sought refuge in the lavatory, lit by a single bulb.

She was trying to coax some water out of the tap when there was a scream from the courtyard. After a frozen moment, she gathered her wits and rushed outside. A girl was crouching in the middle of the courtyard, clutching her throat.

"God!" Katya rushed to her side. The girl was clearly one of the other participants of Goth Weekend, judging from the clothes. "Are you all right?"

Continued on page 90

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FIR NA TINE

For Lisa, sex is as exciting as playing with fire and just as dangerous.

[illegible] 1975, a morning so hot that after just fifteen minutes of recess Lisa Sheldon's pink polyester pants clung to her damp skin and made her thighs itch. She was retrieving a soccer ball from the corner of the playground when she saw him vomit fire into a trash barrel.

[illegible] penis—"

[illegible] her ball and sprinted toward the brick school, her sandals slapping against the asphalt. Past crowds of boys and girls playing tag, dodging kickballs and whittle balls and games of Kick the Can, until she skidded [illegible] aside for teachers.

"Miss Flaherty! You [illegible]"

"Miss Flaherty! [illegible]" Lisa's voice, Lisa's

"Greg's throwing [illegible]"

"Fire? Where, child?"

Lisa led her teacher [illegible] Greg was nowhere to be seen. Miss Flaherty poked around the inside of the [illegible] and asked, "I don't see anything.

"It was coming out of [illegible]"

"You shouldn't tell fanciful stories, [illegible]"

Lisa stomped her foot. "I'm not making it up! She [illegible] she told her parents and older sisters, they didn't believe her either. A few days later school ended for the year and the Schweiterfurth family [illegible] Lisa never saw Greg again.

"Smell that?" Lisa whispered. Six years had passed since that day on the playground. She had grown breasts and started her period. She liked disco dancing and glittery nail polish and hadn't been enjoying the family trip to Florida until this particular evening in Key West. The skies in Florida seemed wider than at home, the air heavier and damper, but she had no trouble recognizing the sweet odor of burning cannabis.

"You're too young for that," her sister Meg whispered back, adjusting her fringed halter top. Meg was only a year older than Lisa, but thought she was the queen of knowing everything because she'd already kissed three different boys.

Their older sister Jill, her face protected by a wide-brimmed hat, asked, "What are you two whispering about?"

"Girls, look." Lisa's father pointed down the seaside pier to a man juggling fire. "Remember, don't try that at home."

Lisa asked, "Can I go watch, Mom?"

"Don't get lost," her mother said.

She jostled her way through the crowd to stand closer to the juggler. Tall, sinewy and bare-chested, with a bald head and a silver hoop in his left ear, he needed only an eye patch to cement the pirate look. Heat poured off his torches, along with the smell of burning gas.

"People ask me how I learned to do this," the juggler said to the crowd. "One third-degree burn at a time."

He pretended to almost drop one. The people around Lisa let out a nervous sound and backed away, but she stood her ground. The juggler caught two of the torches in his left hand and then deftly plunged the third down his throat. When he pulled it out the flame was extinguished. He blew out a long stream of air and fire shot up into the sky.

Lisa joined the crowd in loud applause. "Don't be too impressed," said a barefoot teenager at her elbow. His pooka shell necklace gleamed against his tan, and his blond hair had been bleached nearly white by the sun. "If he was really good, why stay down here at the end of nowhere working for tips?"

Lisa cocked her head as the juggler collected tips and the audience moved on to other performers. "What do you know about it?"

The boy smirked. "There are people who do tricks, and people who really have fire inside them. See?"

He snapped his fingers and produced a small blue flame. Lisa reached toward it, felt genuine heat, and pulled her hand away.

"It's a trick," she said. "You coated your fingers with gas and used a hidden lighter."

"Maybe. But isn't it more fun to believe in magic?"

He leaned forward and kissed her. Heat shot from her lips to her hips. He was burning hot—drenched by sun, baked by it, burned by it all the way to his bones, and for a few fevered seconds she thought maybe he was made of the same burning atoms as the sun itself. Something unfamiliar stirred deep inside her, a wild and wonderful spasm that shook her insides and then faded, leaving her weak-kneed and off balance.

The teenage boy searched Lisa's expression as if hoping to find something. She could only gape at him, dumbfounded, as an aftershock made her shudder.

"Mom," she heard Meg say, "Lisa's kissing strange boys."

He melted away into the crowd. Lisa never saw him again, but that kiss—ah, that kiss! She sought a repeat of it throughout high school, aching to find another boy with the sun in his bones. By the middle of her freshman year at Boston University she had kissed dozens of boys, none of whom held a candle to Key West Boy. By day she concentrated on staying on the Dean's List. By night she combed the bars on Commonwealth Avenue, looking for someone with sparks in his eyes and fire between his fingertips.

"You sure this guy in Key West was really that good?" her roommate Marcia asked one night after they'd both drunk too much.

Dazed, Lisa leaned her forehead against the window of their high-rise dorm room. The lights across the river in Cambridge looked like stars, always twinkling out of reach. "You can't possibly imagine."

Marcia burped. "And what if you never find someone like him again?"

"Not an option," Lisa said.

Sophomore year she dated a fellow history major who seemed so enthralled by the Great Boston Fire of 1872 that she let him take her to bed. For years she would remember him grunting, "Here? Are you sure?" between sheets that smelled like potato chips. Not the experience she'd hoped for, certainly. Maybe Key West Boy had been an illusion brought on by the tropical heat or pot fumes. She almost began to lose faith. Then, in the autumn, she took a Modern European History seminar and met Steven Hogan. Tall, dark-haired, and intensely serious, he came late the first day, tried to slip into the seat beside her, and accidentally brushed her arm.

Warmth flashed up her arm to the base of her skull. Lisa immediately lost track of the professor's lecture and swiveled in her chair. Steven had ducked his head over his notebook, but when he finally looked up she gave him a smile full of promise and innuendo. He blushed and turned away. Not easily deterred, she was ready for him when class ended.

"Aren't you Phil Guarneri's roommate?" Lisa asked.

He shook his head and stuffed his notebook into a frayed green backpack.

"Maybe we met last Christmas. The History Department social?"

Steven headed for the door. "I'm a Spanish major."

On Thursday he came late again. After class she asked, "Didn't we meet at the Student Union? You borrowed money for the vending machine."

He gave her a sideways look. "That wasn't me."

The weekend dragged by. She dreamed of Key West Boy's kisses and woke in damp sheets with an ache her fingers couldn't satisfy. At the end of class on Tuesday she asked, "Didn't we meet at the movies last month? That new Michael J. Fox one?"

Steven looked perplexed. "We haven't met."

She offered her hand. "I'm Lisa."

After a moment he took it. Heat poured down her hand into her whole body, and she smiled.

September 24th was their first date. Pizza and soda at a little campus cubbyhole. Steven was a senior and a runner on the Terrier track team, committed to a vigorous practice schedule and very busy all around, but she wrangled another date out of him and then a third. He walked her back to the Towers that evening, both of them perspiring in the heat of Indian summer. Students crowded the sidewalk under the not-so-dark sky and cars were double-parked up and down Bay State Road. The aroma of grilling hamburgers hung heavy in the air, along with auto exhaust and the muddy smell of the river.

She asked, "Would you like to come up? My roommate's staying with a friend."

"I shouldn't." Steven studied his shoes. "There's stuff you don't know about me."

"We can just talk," she said.

Once upstairs, Lisa put Fleetwood Mac on the turntable and lit the rose-scented candle on her dresser. She draped a red scarf over the table lamp, and the silk fluttered in the breeze from the open window. Steven sat stiffly on the edge of her bed. She sat beside him and put her hand on his knee.

"I know what's inside you," she said.

Steven's voice cracked. "I don't know what you mean."

She told him about Greg Schweinfurth and Key West Boy, the latter not in lurid detail. Steven's gaze remained fixed on her face, relieved but still wary.

"You're like them, aren't you?" she asked.

"You tell me," he said. He kissed her and pleasure sang through her body. She had found the sun again.

By Halloween she was spending weekends at the small apartment Steven shared with nerdy Alan, an engineering major who was usually hunched over the green and black screen of an Apple IIe computer. Steven and Alan had furniture culled from the other people's trash and fought constantly about the housework, but Lisa made sure that at least the spider plant in the kitchen stayed watered. Steven had slept with girls before, he told her, but in bed he was tentative, almost unsure.

"I don't want to hurt you," he said.

"You won't."

She bought a copy of the *Kama Sutra*, ignoring the wide-eyed interest of the bookstore clerk. They leafed through the pages together, tried a few positions, and ended up nearly breaking the old springs of Steven's bed. More than once the neighbors pounded on the walls and Alan began staying over a friend's house on weekends. Lisa walked around campus in a permanent afterglow, daydreaming about the bright flares of Steven's kisses, the heat in his hands, the way he made her simmer with pleasure. Orgasms made her see explosions of red and blue so fierce that her eyes felt damaged afterward.

"When did you first know you had this thing inside you?" she asked one Sunday morning as they shared sections of the *Boston Globe* across the bed.

Steven was sitting up, profiled by the gray daylight falling through the room's only window. "When I was two years old, I burned down our house in Newport."

Lisa blinked. "You did? How do you know?"

Steven leafed through the sports section. "My parents said so. The fire started in the nursery, they didn't smoke, and there were no electrical problems. We lost Grandma's piano, Dad's WWII collection, things that couldn't be replaced."

"But no one saw it happen, did they?"

"They knew it was me. There'd been fires before—little ones when I didn't get what I wanted or I was hungry or something. When my brother was born they said if there were any more, I'd have to go live in an orphanage."

Lisa imagined a small boy trembling as his parents threatened to take away all he knew and loved. "That was wrong."

"They were only trying to protect him. It didn't stop the fires, but it stopped me from telling anyone about them." Steven gazed out the window. "I used to collect stones about people who burned up in their armchairs for no good reason. You ever read those stories? Maybe the fire got out of them. They all of a sudden lost control."

"You don't lose control," she said.

Steven snagged the travel pages. "Not usually."

Lisa hit the stacks of Mugar Library. She lugged armloads of books to his apartment so they could read about spontaneous human combustion, ball lightning, fire-walking, and other strange fire phenomena. Sometimes she thought she was more interested in the research than he was, but then he would ask her to tell the stories of Greg Schwenfurth or Key West Boy again, as if in her descriptions he could reunite with members of a long-scattered family.

December came to Boston, endless cloudy days drained away all traces of color and life from the landscape. The indoor track season consumed Steven's Saturdays and sometimes entire weekends. Lisa threw herself into finals and tried not to resent the time they spent apart. For Christmas she gave him a new backpack and he gave her a necklace with a claddagh charm. On Christmas Eve they took the commuter train out to her family's house in Melrose, and that night they made love in Lisa's old bed.

"So when's the engagement?" Meg asked the next morning as she and Lisa sipped coffee in the sunny kitchen nook.

"Quit it," Lisa warned. "We're nothing like that."

"You wouldn't marry him?"

"I'm not saying that."

Steven planned to take a year off, tour Spain, and then return to Boston to get his Master's degree. By then she'd be ready to graduate, and although they were awfully young to wed, she thought maybe they could at least live together. Through January and February she made secret plans for their future, but one evening at the beginning of March she was sitting by the windows in Mugar when she saw Steven crossing the campus with another girl. Lisa rose to her feet, her notes sliding to the floor, and watched as the blonde girl hooked her hand around Steven's head and pulled him into a passionate kiss.

Flames shot from his mouth again. Lisa dropped the soccer ball and sprinted toward the brick school, her sandals slapping against the asphalt.

For several moments she could do nothing but stand in shock, her limbs like ice. Blindly she gathered her notes and ran back to the Towers, arriving breathless and teary-eyed.

"He wouldn't do that to me. Would he?" she asked Marcia.

Marcia's face showed a curious mix of compassion and relief. "All those nights you spent apart, and you didn't get suspicious?"

After an hour's worth of tears Lisa grabbed her coat. The night was bitterly cold, the campus hushed as students crammed for midterms. Lisa kept her head down against the wind and reached Steven and Alan's apartment just after ten o'clock. She could see Alan in the third floor window, wearing only a T-shirt and noshing on a bag of nachos. After a moment Steven appeared, the blonde girl clinging to him like an octopus. Lisa pushed their buzzer with a shaking finger.

"Yeah, who's there?" Alan asked over the intercom.

"It's Lisa. I know Steven's there."

Silence. She tried to imagine what lies they were concocting.

"Lisa, he's kinda busy."

"He's a fucking asshole! Tell him to get down here."

More silence. She kicked at the ice-encrusted phone books that had been left in the doorway and pushed the buzzer again. She would stand there all night if she had to, keep them awake, wake the neighbors, cause the police to come, it didn't matter.

Steven appeared on the stairs, nearly stumbling in a pair of unlaced boots. His hands shook as he unlatched the door. "Lisa, what's wrong?"

"Do I look like an idiot? You think you can go around cheating and I won't find out?"

"It's not that bad—"

"It's not that bad? You fuck her and it's not that bad?" Lisa punched him in the arm and stalked away. Steven dogged her footsteps, his voice high and quick.

"Will you please stop—" Steven pulled her to a stop. "I can explain!"

I hate you," she said, her face wet and cold.

"I have to do it." He hadn't put on a coat, and she could see him shiver. "It's too much inside me. It builds and it builds, and I get scared that I can't control it. If I'm only with you, you'd get hurt."

"You are so full of shit." Lisa broke his grasp and dashed across the street. A driver beeped at her and she gave him the finger. Steven didn't follow her, but she felt his gaze burning into her back as she hurried away.

Back at the dorm, her phone rang every ten minutes until Marcia yanked it out of the wall. The next day Lisa walked around raw and

wounded, sure that everyone on campus could see her humiliation She started crying in Philosophy class and had to leave She cried again while eating lunch alone and abandoned a whole tray of food When she returned to her dorm a dozen roses were waiting for her. She threw the bouquet into the trash

"Come on," Marcia said. "Let's drown your sorrows."

Three bars and eight beers later, Lisa vomited on a grimy restroom floor and needed Marcia to haul her into the cold night air. A Green Line trolley chugged by, the noise of it making Lisa's head throb They stumbled back to the dorm and saw Steven waiting outside

"Lisa," he said

"Stay away," Lisa said.

"She's in no condition to talk to you," Marcia said

"I must ." His voice caught. "Lisa, I want to make it right."

"Liar." To Marcia she said, "Best sex you'll ever have, and then they break your heart."

She might have said more, maybe even thrown in Key West Boy, but in the morning, hungover with bile in her throat, the memories escaped her She stumbled to the shower and spent twenty minutes under the blast of hot water She went down to the dormitory cafeteria, managed three bites of an omelet, and then returned to bed The paragraphs in her textbooks blurred whenever she tried to read and no amount of aspirin seemed to help her headache

"You look pathetic," Marcia said when she returned in the late afternoon "How do you feel?"

"Lukewarm dead Did I totally humiliate myself last night?"

"I don't know if you humiliated yourself, but you did a number on Steven. You shouted up and down the street that he burned down his parents' house. Is that true?"

Lisa pulled her pillow over her head. "Shit."

On Sunday she took a campus shuttle to the athletic center for the last big event of the indoor track season. Almost fifty teams had arrived to compete She saw athletes from the Terriers, but no Steven. Athletes from Georgia, Richmond, and Duke, still no Steven. Just when she thought he might have skipped the competition, the contestants for the five hundred meter lined up and she saw him bouncing nervously on the tips of his toes.

Whether he sensed her presence or was simply scanning the large

Lisa looked down at his feet. "Did you burn yourself?"

"No. Not even blistered."

She nodded, her throat constricting.

"Lisa .. " he said, and faltered

"You only need me," she blurted out. "No other girls."

"It won't work."

"If it gets too much you can take care of it yourself," she said. "Masturbate."

His ears turned red. "It's not the same."

"If I mean anything to you, you can at least try."

Try they did, for the rest of that month Steven didn't stray, as far as she could tell Sex became better than ever, so good it almost hurt to simply gaze on him, but a curious lassitude began to steal over her She did poorly on two papers Despite the cold spring weather she slept with the windows wide open and the blankets tossed off Her concentration fragmented into little sparkling bits and her skin felt tight and hot, as if she had an invisible sunburn.

"Lisa, it's me that's doing this," Steven said one afternoon as she lay listlessly on his sofa. He put a cold cloth on her forehead. "We can't stay together this way

"Don't be silly," she said. "It's just the flu."

The physicians at the student clinic couldn't find anything wrong with her. She took cold showers, sucked on cups full of ice cubes, and ate pint after pint of vanilla ice cream. She craved Steven's touch more than ever, but one evening he entered her and the heat was so intense she got lost in the fire She woke with two paramedics standing over the bed.

"You had a seizure," they told her.

At the hospital they ran tests that revealed nothing "Fever of unknown origin," the ER doctor decided, and after a couple hours of observation discharged her with instructions to follow up with the campus clinic. Steven arranged for a cab to take them back to his apartment. She got out first and saw a man standing in the doorway of Steven's building as if waiting for someone. He was in his late thirties, dark-haired, with a square face and square jaw

"Who's that?" she asked

Steven finished paying the cab driver "Who?"

Lisa nodded her head, but the man was already moving away

He was burning hot—drenched by sun ... and for a few fevered seconds she thought maybe he was made of the same burning atoms as the sun itself

audience, she didn't know Steven's gaze locked on her and she forced herself not to squirm. He looked away, his lips tight, and then took his position. When the race started he took off down his lane faster than she had ever seen him run. He was a blur to her as he circled round the far end of the track, and when he crossed the finish line he'd shattered the school record.

The crowd was still applauding when Lisa saw smoke rising from his sneakers. fine gray wisps of burning rubber.

Someone by the judge's bench pointed his finger Lisa heard a shout and then a yell, and someone dumped a cooler of water over Steven's feet She went down to the railing, but a guard asked her to stand back and she could only chew on her thumbnail while the competition paused and confusion reigned. When the races ended for the day she intercepted Steven in the parking lot. He came out with a few friends, all of them ribbing him about setting the track world on fire. When they were gone Steven stood awkwardly beside her and fidgeted with the strap of his bag. The sun had finally come out, weak and small in the spring sky.

"I'm sorry for what I said," she told him. "I was out of line."

Steven only shrugged

down the sidewalk, in a hurry to be somewhere else. In the doorway Steven bent to pick up a piece of folded newspaper.

"I think he dropped this." Steven unfolded it and blanched "It's about what happened at the track meet last month. My sneakers."

Lisa gazed down the sidewalk, but the man had disappeared

"Maybe he's a reporter," she said.

"Coming around at midnight?" Steven shook his head but said no more. He ushered her upstairs and sat her in an armchair while he changed the bedsheets Alan was tapping away on his keyboard in the other room, tap-tap-tap, and she wondered what was so damn engrossing about computers

"Come on, get some rest." Steven pulled her into his bedroom. She lay with the window open, streetlight substituting for moonlight, and he sat in the corner with his knees drawn to his chest

"It's not you," she murmured, but they both knew it was a lie The next day she went back to her dorm room and crawled into bed. On their third day apart her fever broke

"We have to find a way to be together," she said to Steven on the phone

"Two nights a week? One? What kind of life is that for you?"

She said "It's not about the sex."

Steven's voice was very quiet "I know you like me, Lisa, but why are you willing to suffer and risk so much? If it's not the sex, what is it?"

It's the fire, she thought. It was touching the sun and being touched in return.

"Steven—" she said, but she had lost him already. Three weeks later he graduated, and four months after that she got a letter postmarked from New London, Connecticut. He had dropped plans of graduate school and become a firefighter instead.

"Fighting fire with fire," he wrote, and signed it, "Love always, Steven."

In the spring of 1985 Lisa graduated and took a job working for her aunt in the Elders Affairs Department at Melrose City Hall. Her job consisted of fielding complaints from senior citizens and connecting them to various city or state resources. The work was rewarding and sometimes interesting, and within a few years she took over her aunt's position. A few years after that she became the director of a small nonprofit that serviced seniors across the county.

She lived alone in the second-floor apartment of an old Victorian with a Scottish terrier and rooms crammed full of heavy cherry furniture inherited from her grandmother. The men she took to her four-poster bed often admired the woodwork and craftsmanship. She dated no one longer than a month or so, but considered her romantic life no worse than that of her sisters. Meg married at twenty-six and divorced three years later with a toddler and a newborn to care for. Jill moved to San Francisco and announced she was a lesbian.

"Still," she confided to Lisa, "even out here, it's hard to find someone to really connect to, you know?"

Lisa knew. Lisa had memories of the sun embedded in her brain, and no lover after Steven came close to triggering that same melting response in her bones and muscles. Although she knew no good could come of it, she began looking for that heat again. She dated local firemen, but though all of them had soot under their fingernails, none of them had fire in their souls. She dated the local newspaperman who covered fires, but he was an uninspired lover who muttered dirty words to himself while she did most of the work. She even dated a firebug, a tall, well-mannered insurance executive who listened obsessively to emergency scanners and showed up at every fire he could.

"Professional curiosity?" Lisa asked.

"I just like fires," he said, and there was no arguing with that.

Marcia, who'd taken a job as a corporate attorney in Manhattan, offered unsolicited advice. "You're never going to find someone who makes you feel the same way Steven did. Move on, OK? Enjoy yourself."

Lisa tried. By the time she was thirty she had dated a doctor with a commitment problem, a car mechanic with money woes, a professional poker player who never seemed to win, and a car salesman who liked her to wear high heels to bed. Nice men, most of them, but easy to forget. When she was thirty one she and Marcia took a Caribbean cruise. There were only ten single women on the entire ship, and the dining room maitre d' seated them all at the same table as objects of either admiration or pity. She turned thirty-two and donned a maid of honor dress for her sister Meg's second marriage. She turned thirty-three and met an electrician named Joe, who walked his terrier Oswald in the same park where she walked Hephaistos.

"Nice furniture," he said when she invited him home.

One hot summer day one of Lisa's caseworkers called in sick, and she took it upon herself to keep an appointment with a pair of elderly Irish sisters. The inside of their small cottage was immaculate, not a single lace doily out of place. Mabel Flaherty was seventy-nine years old and suffering from macular degeneration. Lucy Flaherty, slightly younger and wheezing an oxygen tank behind her, had a familiar mole on her cheek.

"You used to teach at the Mary Ronan School, Miss Flaherty," Lisa said. "I was in your fourth-grade class."

Lucy peered over the rims of her glasses. "That was many years ago, child."

"I told you once that a boy was throwing up fire, and you told me I was making it up."

"Fir Na Tine," Mabel fumbled at the plate in the center of the kitchen table. "Would you like another cookie?"

"Fir Na Tine?" Lisa asked.

"Myths and fables," Lucy said.

Lisa's pulse sped up. "There are myths of men made of fire?"

Lucy rolled her eyes in exasperation, but Mabel leaned forward, her face intently serious. "The villagers back home used to tell stories about men forged from fire. The Fir Na Tine. They could burn down a field with the tips of their fingers, or set a forest afire with one cross look."

"But I looked in Libraries—"

"They're not a people who want to be known," Mabel said. "Like you and me, they are, but very careful about who they marry."

"Poppycock and lies," Lucy said. "Don't fill the child's head with nonsense."

Lisa went back to the library. The only references she could find to Fir Na Tine were in the logos of American fire departments with strong Irish ties. She contacted one of her old professors at BU, a man who specialized in Irish and Celtic myths.

"Heard of them," he said. "Oral bits here and there, nothing written down, not enough for a paper or journal. The French have their own version, if I remember right. Hommes de feu? Something like that."

Fir Na Tine, Hommes de Feu, Men of Fire. Lisa dreamed of Steven standing calmly in a sea of flames, reaching for her with a sad look on his face. The next morning her phone rang and the caller identified himself as Captain David Baresse of the New London Fire Department in Connecticut.

"I'm very sorry to have to tell you," he said. "But Steven left a list of people to call, and you're at the top of it."

Joe the electrician offered to come to Steven's funeral with her. Lisa told him she would be fine. She drove down to Connecticut and a family-run funeral home near the Thames River. The wake began at four o'clock in a whitewashed front parlor and by four-fifteen the room was crammed full of firemen in somber blue uniforms. Two air conditioners hummed in the windows, but so many mourners made it almost as sweltering inside as the August evening outside. Lisa knew only Alan, Steven's old roommate, who had gone almost completely bald and had done well for himself with Microsoft stock. They stood near the closed white and gold casket, staring at Steven's official portrait on an easel.

"It doesn't seem real," Alan said. "Drowning while rescuing a kid from the river. He never did like to swim, but who expects that? Who dies at fucking thirty-four years old?"

Lisa didn't answer. She didn't know if she had any tears left in her. She stared at Steven's picture, noting the lines that had crept in around his eyes. The thought of his body in the closed casket only a few feet away made her nearly sick to her stomach. She had loved that body, had lain with it, had held and made love to it, and now it would go to the ground for only worms to enjoy. And what of the man himself, his intelligence, his dreams and hopes? Gone, she thought, all gone.

"Lisa," Alan said, "this is Captain Baresse. The fire chief."

Lisa looked at Baresse's face and felt as if she'd stepped back in time to a cold winter street.

"Miss Sheldon," the square-faced, square-jawed captain said. If he remembered her from the night Steven brought her home from the hospital, he gave no indication. "Steven spoke of you fondly."

Perfunctorily she shook his hand. "Thank you—" she said, and then broke off as a tiny bit of heat shot up her arm. Just a flicker, barely perceptible, but there wasn't the slightest acknowledgment in

his eyes, not a single slip of control. He was steel, she thought, welded and strong under his jacket and medals. He might be an inferno inside, a red-hot furnace so hot it glowed white, steam boiling past the pressure point, but his palms were cool and callused, the fire tightly self-contained.

Lisa stayed in a motel that night, sleepless with grief and a shame less fantasy of Baresse and the heat in his hands. She sat stoically through the funeral mass the next morning, ignoring Jesus on the cross and the saints in their stained glass windows. The burial itself, in a well-tended cemetery overlooking the river, was picture perfect.

"See you in the afterlife, pal," Alan said, and dropped a handful of dirt into the open grave.

Lisa could no longer cry or feel anything but a dull gnawing in her chest. "It wasn't about the sex," she whispered, and let a red rose fall down to the coffin. "Goodbye, Steven."

Baresse had invited everyone back to his house after the funeral. Lisa followed Alan's Lexus to a small white Colonial on a quiet cul-de-sac. The dim, cool house was full of photos of Baresse and his friends skiing, mountain-climbing, and hiking across winter ridges. No frills, flowers, or lace for this bachelor, she decided. On the back lawn, buffet tables had been covered with hamburgers, fried chicken, salad, and fudge brownies. Baresse held court at the grill, drinking beer alongside other men from the department. She couldn't imagine confronting him with her questions. And what was the point, really? What good did it do to know that men of fire existed if they were unattainable to those who most desired them?

Instead of going out to the lawn she drifted to a framed photo of Baresse, Steven, and three other men, judging from the soot and grime on their faces, they had recently put out some raging inferno. They looked tired but proud, and Steven was grinning ear-to-ear. Fresh grief tried to wake inside her, but all she could manage was a little sniff.

"Were you a friend of Steven's?" a dark-haired woman asked. She was pretty and petite, and despite the hot summer day wore a dark blue cardigan over her sundress.

"We knew each other at college." Lisa offered her hand. "Lisa Sheldon."

"Maria Lopez." The woman's fingers were icy cold. "Everyone's going to miss Steven terribly."

"You knew him?"

"I know all of David's men. Steven was the nicest of them all, the one everyone trusted and liked. He was that kind of guy, you know?"

"I know."

Lisa stayed only for a few more minutes. Before she left, she saw Maria go to Baresse's side by the grill and slide under his arm. Baresse kissed the top of her head and smiled fondly at her. Their relationship would never last, of course. It was doomed from the very beginning.

"Marry me," said the note in Lisa's fortune cookie.

"Joe," she said, looking across the restaurant table, "we've been through this before. Why ruin a perfectly good relationship with a ring?"

He smiled nervously. Chinese music played in the background, and an immense koi fish swam in a tank beside their booth. "Because we've been seeing each other for almost four years and I'm tired of commuting between your place and mine, Lisa. Because the dogs miss each other when we're apart. Because I want to wake up every morning next to your smiling face."

"You hate my morning breath," she reminded him.

"And if we're going to have children, we'd better start now."

She bristled at the implication. "I'm not forty yet."

"I am. I'll be on Social Security by the time our first kid gets out of high school."

"We'll talk about it when I get back from Jill's, how's that?" Lisa sighed for the check. "I can't concentrate on anything until I know she's better."

She tried not to think of Joe's proposal on the flight out to San Francisco. She knew her parents would be delighted if she married him. "He's a good man," her father had said, right after Joe helped him replace a circuit breaker box. "Handsome, too," Lisa's mother added, "and always so neat." Lisa could list his many fine attributes all day long, but she still didn't know if she wanted to spend her whole life with him.

"Why does everyone think you have to be married to be happy?" she had once asked her sister Meg, recently divorced for the second time.

"They don't," Meg replied. "But at least when you're a couple, you get to share the misery."

By the time the plane landed in San Francisco, Lisa was no closer to an answer than she'd been at take-off. Jill and Jill's lover Naomi met her at the gate. Dark haired Naomi was carefree and quick to laugh. Jill didn't look sick at all. She had made herself fashionably thin, spent far too much money on chic haircuts and blonde dye jobs, and was fussy with everything from the cut of her business suits to the position of a small vase on an end table.

"I worry about everything," Jill said over dinner in their large, sculpture-filled condominium near the Castro. "Every little detail."

Naomi patted her hand. "That's why you have me, sweetheart. To remind you about the big picture."

Two days later the nurses wheeled Jill into an operating room. Lisa sat and read magazines full of Halloween decorating tips for six hours. Naomi phoned friends, paced the halls, went home to feed the fish, and returned with a box of gourmet cookies for the nursing staff. Jill's oncologist and surgeon came out to report that the tumor had been large and unwieldy but, in the final analysis, benign.

"That's one fucking important detail," Naomi said, and broke down in tears.

While Jill recovered, Naomi showed Lisa around the city. They took a walking tour of Nob Hill, spent several hours at the Maritime Museum, had dinner in Chinatown, and then made the rounds of upscale gay and straight clubs. At one crowded, very loud place near Fisherman's Wharf, Lisa downed two margaritas in quick succession, relishing the bite of salt and lime.

"You better hold your booze better than your sister," Naomi warned.

"I hold it very well." Lisa let her gaze travel over gyrating dancers with bare midriffs and six-pack abs. "How old do I look?"

Naomi threw back a shot of bourbon. "That's a terrible question to ask."

"My boyfriend wants to get married. How do I know he's the right one?"

Naomi ordered more drinks. "How does anyone?"

Lisa leaned back in her chair and watched a man in a black turtleneck and leather jacket take a seat at the bar. He looked tight and unhappy, one of those brooding types, and showed no interest in the pretty young Tammies and Michelles flitting about in their tight pants. If cigarette smoking hadn't been outlawed in all San Francisco bars she imagined he'd be smoking something long and European. Not gay, she decided, though she'd been mistaken before.

"Do you love him?" Naomi asked.

The man at the bar toyed with his napkin. It burst into flame, but he scrunched it into the palm of his hand before anyone could notice.

"Oh, Christ." Lisa lurched to her feet.

"What's wrong—"

"I know that guy," she said, a lie, but she didn't have time for explanations. The stranger was standing and finishing the last of his beer. She pushed through the crowd of dancers and almost toppled a waitress's tray. Hot, damp bodies blocked her way and conspired against her. Lisa caught the man halfway to the door and grabbed his jacket.

"Wait!" Lisa said. "I can help you!"

Up close, she could see he was much younger than she—mid-twenties, perhaps, certainly not much older. Anger poured out of him in all directions like dark, toxic smoke.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked.

"I know what you are!" Lisa tried to grab his hand but he shrugged her off. "I know about the fire!"

"Fuck off," he said, and went outside.

Lisa followed. The chill night air reeked of fish and diesel as she teetered after him on her clumsy high heels. "There are others! You're not alone!"

He paused in the act of mounting a Harley. A muscle in his cheek twitched. A Ferrari zoomed by, its radio pounding out a bass line.

"You're not alone," she said.

"Tell me," he demanded.

Lisa rubbed her arms. "Take me to your place."

She had never ridden a motorcycle before. He helped her climb on, gave her his helmet to wear and then, without warning, they were off, the engine deafeningly loud and vibrating between her legs, the streets slipping under the wheels like magic. He took her up a steep hill and down the other side of it to a converted factory and his studio apartment, which was filled with half-finished canvases, fire extinguishers, and the heady smell of oil paint. His only furniture was a mattress, a battered old kitchen set, and a TV sitting on a milk crate. The refrigerator in the kitchen rattled and whined.

"My name is Mark Chang," he said.

"I'm Lisa." The loft was cold and dark, with street light spilling in through the towering windows. Going off with a strange man in an unfamiliar city suddenly didn't look like such a smart idea. Mark Chang pulled two green bottles from the dying refrigerator and handed her one.

He gulped down half of his and asked, "What did you mean? Others?"

"Fir Na Tine." She stepped closer to him, aching for the heat of his touch. "You're like them. Maybe you burned your house down by accident when you were a kid. Maybe you set things on fire all the time and don't know why."

His dark eyes bored into her. "Who else?"

Lisa touched his arm. Blessed warmth tingled through her fingers. "Make love to me."

"I don't even know you, crazy lady."

No doubt he'd had women his own age, pretty girls with smooth, unlined faces. Insecurity washed through her at the thought she could no longer seduce at will, that her moment in the sun had passed.

How long have you been alone, thinking you were the only one?" she asked. His breathing hitched but he didn't move a muscle. "How long have you been afraid and angry?"

"You don't want me," he said. "I can't control it."

Lisa stroked his dark hair. "I can help."

His mouth closed on hers. Heat roared down her throat and she cried out a welcome for it. Mark Chang fumbled at her blouse and bra but she ripped them off for him, finesse forgotten, and they tumbled onto cold cotton sheets. When his hands cupped her breasts, pleasure ignited all the way to the base of her spine. He pulled at her jeans as she dug at his back, desperate for more. He slid between her thighs and she arched up, nearly consumed, the supernova inside her now, scorching her, scalding her vagina, too much, too much, like a welding torch to her loins, she was roasting from the inside out, screams torn from her throat as she tried to push him away, God, away, and when he collapsed beside her she crawled off the mattress and curled up on the cold wooden floor.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, and didn't touch her. Lisa didn't know how long she lay there, hurting in the darkness. Tears stung her cheeks and the back of her throat. When the sky outside the windows turned gray she pulled herself to her feet. Her thighs felt blistered and seared, but the skin was barely pink. She pulled on her clothes and fumbled for the telephone.

"Directory assistance for New London, Connecticut," she said to the operator. "Steven Baresse."

"I have no listing for Steven Baresse," the operator said. "I have a

He was steel, she thought, welded and strong under his jacket and medals. He might be an inferno inside, a red hot furnace so hot it glowed white...

David and Maria Baresse on Lincoln Street, will that do?"

She realized her mistake. "I'm sorry. Yes, that's fine."

Although it was three AM on the East Coast, David Baresse answered sounding alert and ready for disaster.

"Fir Na Tine," Lisa said. "I have someone who needs your help."

She handed the phone to Mark Chang and went out into the cold morning rain to find her way home.

Lisa stayed in San Francisco for two more weeks on the pretense of helping Naomi care for Jill. When she finally did return home, she said yes to Joe's proposal. They eloped to Hawaii, where their hotel room overlooked the nightly luau show and men juggling fire sticks.

"Let's go watch," Joe said.

Lisa pulled the curtain. "Let's not."

She didn't think of Mark Chang if she could help it, but one detail from that unfortunate night stayed with her long past the point when she should have let it go. She checked the phone listings for New London again and yes, she'd heard it correctly. David and Maria Baresse. They had married. On the anniversary of Steven's death she went down there for the dedication of a firefighters' memorial and decided to ask the question. David Baresse, his hair gone silver and a new scar on his cheek, was as unapproachable as ever during the ceremony on the lawn of the town library. Instead Lisa cornered Maria in the small ladies room in the library basement.

"You're Steven's friend," Maria said, and Lisa nodded.

"I have to ask you something, and I'm sorry if it's personal." Her voice came out louder than she'd intended and she lowered it. "I know David's like Steven was. I know about the Fir Na Tine."

Maria gazed solemnly at her. Hot air wafted in through the window, bringing with it the sound of children playing. Lisa thought of a long ago playground and a little boy bent over a barrel.

"I tried all my life, and I could never—they were too much. I learned my lesson. But how do you do it? How do you stand the heat?"

Maria didn't answer.

"Please," Lisa said. "I have to know."

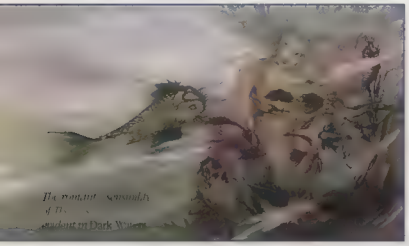
Another long moment passed. Finally Maria reached over and touched Lisa's arm with cold, nearly icy fingers. "In my mother's village, the old folks spoke about men with fire boiling in their blood. *Los hombres del fuego*. They could only marry a special kind of woman, *las mujeres del hielo*. All their lives these men and women would look for one another, trying to find a perfect balance. Maybe your mother or grandmother was like that, maybe you have a little of their blood. You recognize these men when you see them, but you don't have enough *hielo* in you to match their fire. Do you understand?"

Steven had been the Spanish major. Lisa knew only English, and the language of loss and longing. She shook her head.

"*Las mujeres del hielo*," Maria said. "Women of ice."

Mistress of Winds by Christophe Vacher

Doorway to Enchantment



The magical serendipity of fi... evident in Dark Waters

The Duirwaigh Gallery is a treasure trove of the fantastic, and home to some of fantasy's best and brightest.

Interview By Ari Berk

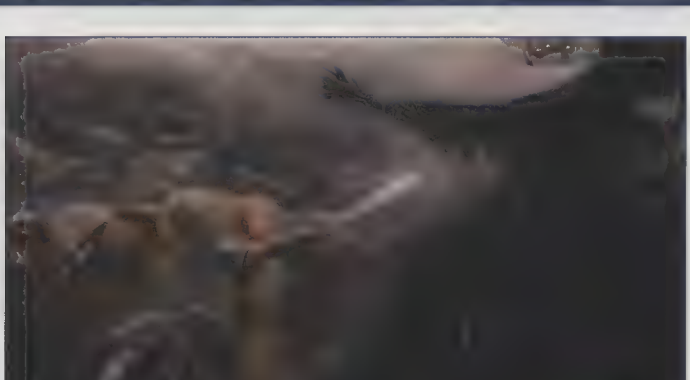
Lo... ...ing and ... ...ggen... ... you ... ... build a ... ... by Es... ... to the t... ... use o... very p...icular ... ...gs. Far ... commonplace ... must ... ...inspire and infuse the spirit with ... ...wonder ... ...ge and ...nderful, full of ... and promise, bitterness and honey both.

Feather of a flying horse
String from the harp of gold
Tears of the Phoenix
Roses from a fairy bower
Water of the singing stone
Hair from the Hag's comb
Sail of the cloud ship
Sword of a king
Song of mountain gods
Key to the gates of dawn

...ation of gryphons
...ine of the white stag
Leaves from the forest of dreams

...here are the some of the essential ele... ... Gallery. Angi Sullins, president and creator of Duirwaigh, has walked a remarkable path to draw these ingredients together and reveal ... to create a vision-based business promoting some of the most talented artists in contemporary fantasy: Kinuko Y. Craft, Thomas Canty, Charles Vess, Wendy Froud, Terri Windling, Marc Fishman, Christopher Vacher, and Angel Dominguez, to name but a few.

The history of her company has taken on the trappings of a fairy tale, and to hear her speak of her experiences is to listen to a tale



Matt Stewart's piece Rowyn and the Nazgul *brings legend to life.*

dark woods each in their turn. Indeed, her

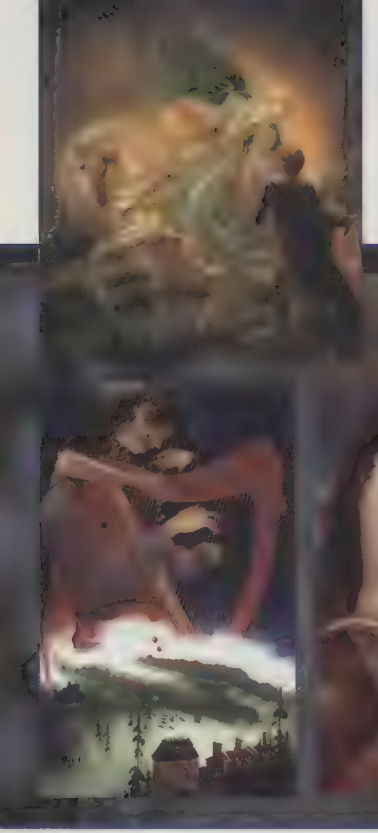
quently travel together. At the first annual Mythic Journeys conference in Atlanta, I had the pleasure of sitting down with Angi to talk about her tumultuous history, the origins of or Durwaigh's future.

ney and your life's quest. How did this journey begin for you?

Angi Sullins: Intuitively I understood, long before I was wounded, that art was a healer, a teacher, [illegible] since I was a child has filled me with longing. That sense of longing [illegible] into me was a sense of [illegible] peaches [illegible] failed to challenge my sense of self and community, art never denied me. It was a catalyst for growth, always beckoning me to think deeper, reach higher. It was art that often led me on quests for meaning.

AB: So as in a hundred fairy tales, your story began with a sense of longing, with a name- [illegible] everyday, something only approachable through the metaphorical, the artful?

AS: Yes. Durwaigh began as a seedling while I was [illegible] strolling through an outdoor art show in St. Louis, Missouri. I turned to my companion and said, "There's a redheaded elf doll calling me." My friend thought I was [illegible] d I, too, had to wonder [illegible] as I was neither a doll nor an elf collector [illegible] y there was [illegible] doll in the show. However at the end of the street where the art show was staged, I [illegible] a [illegible] who [illegible] introduced me to several magazines that



fundraising event had just arrived that morning. Wendy's new piece was entitled "And They Danced" and featured a red-headed elf girl dancing with a troll. Shivers went down my spine. Not only could this be the image that had persisted in my thoughts for months, but the piece involved dance as well, which had always been an important life-metaphor for me. I had been a ballerina for ten years and in college had written a small piece of prose entitled "And They Danced." The coincidence seemed too bizarre, so when the owner of the gallery offered to send me the very slide she had received that morning, I answered with a resounding "yes."

AB: What was the experience of seeing that slide image once you'd received it? Of having that vision made manifest in a picture you could hold and see?

AS: I still have that slide, for when I received it and held it up to

specialized in something called "Doll Art Sculpture", which I had never seen.

One day, while flipping through past issues of the magazines on my lunch hour, I found an ad for a doll sculpture fundraiser, benefiting a pediatric aids foundation in New York City. Featured in the small article was a photo of a troll sculpture by Wendy Froud. I called immediately. The owner of the gallery informed me that the article was nine months old, and the piece long gone. But strangely enough, the slides for Wendy Froud's submission for the next

the light, my life changed. Something HUGE happened to me that I still cannot entirely express. A force, a sense of grandeur, overwhelmed me. I began shaking. My pulse quickened. I felt my own world melt away, as if I was nothing. In the presence of some enigmatic bigness, I felt tiny. I was in an office, surrounded by suits, pantyhose, and protocol, so you can imagine the looks I got as I stood there, face turned toward the light, visibly vibrating. I could not explain what was happening any more than I could explain that somehow I knew my life was changing there on the spot. The

moment had a flavor to it that was intoxicatingly foreign, a flavor I now know as Destiny

It took some time before I regained my composure But when I gathered my wits, I called my mother, who was and is my sounding board When I think I might be going crazy, it's not ghostbusters, but Mernie I call for spiritual grounding She urged me to buy the piece, regardless of the fact that its price was more than twice my monthly salary I whipped out my credit card and followed her advice

AB Was aquiring the sculpture the end of the story?
AS Well, little did I know that two weeks later I would find myself

TOP, FAR LEFT: Thomas the Rhymer, by Kimiko Y. Craft. FAR LEFT: Moonheart, by Charles Vess. LEFT: Amergin's Believed's Return. TOP: Charles Vess creates mayhem with Twa Corbies. ABOVE: Alice and Humgriffon, by Angel Dominguez, proves that the spirit of Adventure is alive and well. FAR RIGHT: Harkening back to the days of Waterhouse and Burne-Jones, is Marc Fishman's Return of the King. RIGHT: Wendy Froud's And They Danced

face to face with Wendy Froud at a Doll Art Event in Santa Fe, New Mexico I had never met her before and had only just discovered her work but I described to her and to her husband Brian the beginnings of a dream that was formulating in my mind a gallery and a museum, situated in an enchanted wood, filled with marvels by artists from around the globe … a place not only for the seekers of enchantment to be inspired, but also a place for artists to replenish their creativity

well when they've found it's run dry They were both particularly pleased by the notion, and I left the meeting encouraged and energized to make the dream a reality

AB But as is often the case with quests, there were problems. Soon after this event, you were hospitalized. What kind of role did art play in your recovery?
AS. Six weeks after the event in Santa Fe, I was admitted to the hospital to alleviate a pinched nerve in my neck A disc in my spinal column had become herniated and needed to be replaced with bone I was assured the surgery was safe and routine, though serious. I feel asleep under the anesthesia reciting Alice in Wonderland I awoke to a nightmare. I could not move my neck, arms, or legs I was completely paralyzed and the doctors could not say why. This, however, turned out to be the easy part What proceeded was a horrendous and torturous experience with the hospital staff. The dark truth of the tale was that the paralysis and its shocking implications for my life were nothing in comparison to the treatment I received Whether the physicians and staff were incompetent or merely threatened, I'll never know But their nightmarish treatment began a slow descent, for me, from a colorful, charismatic world into a gray and lifeless abyss

Months later, as I was slowly winning the outer struggle to regain

physical sensation and even the most basic of movements, I was losing the inner struggle to regain hope and color. I sat at my apartment window watching Sunday fade to Friday, sunrise fade to twilight, with all their varying shades of gray. However, the day the postman arrived with a box from England, containing a playful Puck sculpture by Wendy Froud as a gift to encourage my healing, was a day that marked a turning of my psychological tides. I knew, looking at the little guy, that something was waiting for me on the other side of Damage. If I could—if there was any way possible—for me to rise from the ashes of the experience with my physical, but especially my spiritual, strength intact, then I would go on to great things. I knew it as surely as I knew my life was changing when I first held that slide up to the light. Life was changing, once again, and through a work of art I not only glimpsed, but tasted my future. It was salted with tears and peppered with hardship, but the taste was unmistakably sweet and smelled keenly of triumph.

AB Have you had this type of connection with the work of other artists?

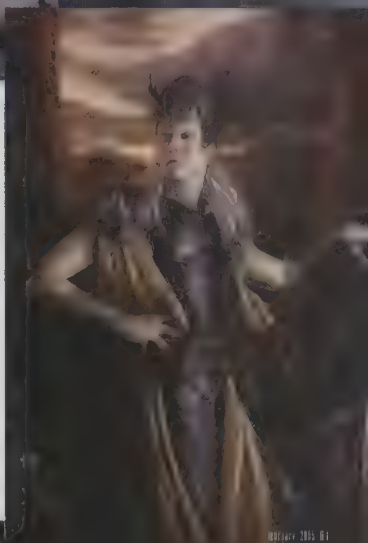
AS The connection with Wendy Froud's art was a profound and stunning experience for me. However, it is not singular. It is important to mention that with all the artists within Dairwaigh I have similar stories of connection. Angel Dominguez and I unknowingly made each other's dreams come true in 1998, long before we ever met. Amoreno played an instrumental role in my healing process two years before we were introduced and I became his agent. Kinuko Y. Craft changed my life in 2002 in a staggering way, after I'd had a premonition about her in a children's bookstore in 1996. The Dairwaigh annals are filled with miraculous meetings, strange occurrences, bizarre twists of fate, and with what Greg Spalenka called "better than fiction stories," when we met for dinner at last year's San Diego ComiCon.

As I review their tales, it becomes abundantly clear that I am not the author of this story, nor the creator behind the creation. I am merely a participant, a dreamer on a field of dreams much larger than myself.

AB In describing your process of selecting artists to work with, you say that they must elicit "the Voice" in you. What does this mean?

AS It's really just a message of intuition, but I've called it the Voice since I saw the movie *Field of Dreams*. The central character, after hearing a voice in his cornfield, plows down his lucrative crop in order to build a completely nonsensical baseball diamond. He just has to do it, though he doesn't know why. This was strangely familiar territory, and as I watched Kevin Costner in this role, I recognized myself. I can't explain it, but that's the point. I know when I hear that Voice it's like that moment in the movie when the main charac-

TOP FAR LEFT: Midsummer Night's Dream *by Mari Yosimari. BOTTOM FAR LEFT:* Kimono *by Craft Daughter of Exile. TOP MIDDLE LEFT:* Soul *by Kimuko Y. Craft. BOTTOM MIDDLE LEFT:* Elements *by charming past and breathtaking future come together in Amorena's lyonesse. LEFT:* Vaccor *Stormbreakers gives us nature's stark beauty with a touch of the fantastic. ABOVE:* Thomas Canty's *alluring* Swan Queen. *BELOW:* Eire *by Matt Stewart*



ter travels across the country to take a man he's never met to baseball game for a reason he doesn't yet know. But while they're there, something miraculous happens and they are transformed by the magic of the experience.

AB: And in the end, those two characters were radically transformed not only by what transpired from their meeting, but through their willingness to serve, yes? To follow the Voice into the unknown, to build something for others? Their journey marked out a path that could be utilized by countless other dreamers.

AS: Exactly. For me it always involves a journey into the unknown with another person. When I hear the Voice, I know I'll be saying to that person, "I don't know why, but I need to serve your work."

There are artists whose works elicit excitement in me. Their vision and talent take me to places I cannot get to on my own, and I am deeply moved because of them. Yet, still there is no Voice. The Voice comes when I least expect it, always unbeckoned and unannounced. When it speaks to me about an artist, I find myself overwhelmed with longing. I never know whose art will conjure that sense of longing, but it is a siren's call for me and when I hear it, I must answer it without question.

The lure of that siren's call is almost unbearable. It fills me with inspiration to the point of tears and I can no longer contain myself. I then have no other choice but to offer my gratitude in the form of service, to find a way to return to the artists what they have given me, to pay the debt of inspiration they have so unwittingly provided. Only then can I replace the sense of longing with belonging; only then do I feel that I am truly living my purpose.

Continued on page 89

BY PATRICK SAMPHIRE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MELISSA FERRETTI

Crab Apple

I saw it for the first time on the night I'd gone to see The Evil Dead with Dad. It was 1 thought Dad had been drinking again. There were beer cans scattered across the floor, but the cans were still full, and I couldn't smell alcohol. There was something strange about the way Dad was lying. His eyes too still. His stick-thin arms and legs were sprawled loosely across the sofa. I thought for a moment he was dead. He was still breathing, though, a sneezy, tight sound, as though a plastic straw was stuck in his throat. He didn't wake when I took him. I'd begun taking first aid classes at school when Dad started losing weight and coughing. There was no one else at home to help, but they had never shown us how to deal with one. I put him in the recovery position and called an ambulance. The girl was there when I went outside to wait for the ambulance. She was squatting on our garden wall like a wild-haired monkey. She had on a dirty, white t-shirt and shorts that showed scratched legs. I guessed she was about fourteen, the same age as me. Her eyes were as brown as oak and her cheeks were decorated with sunburned. There were flakes in her tangled hair. "What's your name?" she said. "You wanna know your name?" "Josh," I said. "Joshua," she laughed. "Stupid name." She wrinkled down at me. Her grin was as wide as her face. Then she leaped from the wall and dashed away up the road, her wild hair streaming behind her like a comet's tail. I watched her disappear. In the distance I heard the ambulance siren approaching. "You want to see something?" The wild girl leaned against the school lockers. She was wearing a school uniform, without the tie, but she'd gotten mud on her blouse already, and her hair was the same mess. I'd spent most the night at the hospital by Dad's bed, waiting for him to wake up. He hadn't. "No," I said. "You want to know my name?" "No." She shoved her sunburned face close to mine. Her brown eyes glittered. "I don't care. Stupid boy." She laughed and spun down the corridor, arms outstretched. "Stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid," she shouted as she spun. My face turned red. The door to the staff room burst open, and Mrs. Wilson strode out, her thick skirt slapping like a whip against her [illegible] "The [illegible] looked back. "

Sometimes it's easier to embrace the wildness in life than it is to fight it. Sometimes it's more effective too.

Then she ran again

Mrs Wilson pushed back her glasses Her lips were tight "Little madam," she said She glared at me as though I was to blame "She's got the devil in her, that one She'll be nothing but trouble, you mark my words, Josh Nothing but trouble"

"He's awake," the nurse said She let me into Dad's room

He was sunk into the stiff white sheets like a balloon with half its air let out There was a tube running up his nose and another leading to his arm from a bag of clear liquid hooked up on a stand

He turned his head, blinking

"Josh " His voice was hoarse, like he'd been shouting

"How are you doing, Dad?" I tried to stop my voice shaking I didn't want to seem like a kid

"Been better, been worse " He worked his lips, as though his mouth was dry "See, the old devil's put his hand into my chest, lad Left a bit of a gift for me

He coughed His thin chest shuddered. He turned and spat into a metal bowl by his bed The spit was thick and threaded with blood He gave me a painful grin

"Want to hear a name for the devil they never taught you in that Sunday school, lad? Forty-a-day. Good, hey?" He laughed. It was a painful, breathless sound. "Old forty-a-day'll get you every time "

I tried to smile, but couldn't He looked shriveled away, eaten from the inside. His cheeks were caved in, his skin almost yellow and sagging against his bones, his eyes bloodshot and too big in his face This wasn't my dad It was his reflection in a dead mirror, a body from the desert

"Want to see my X-rays?" he said

"OK." I said

"End of the bed The blue folder

I pulled them out and held them up to the window. I could see his ribs and spine as clear white Two large gray shapes behind the ribs must have been his lungs

"What's this?

I pointed at a black lump almost as large as one of Dad's fists in the bottom of the right lung

"Apple Swallowed an apple Hey? Hey?" He coughed again I'm tired, lad. Bloody tired. You wouldn't think so after all that sleep " His eyes fluttered shut. He sighed, and his body relaxed on the bed

I stood over him, staring down at that exhausted face. I wondered how long he'd been so tired I hadn't noticed. Too busy rushing around. I swallowed to stop a sob. He looked twenty years older than I remembered

For a moment his eyelids popped open again. "Don't let your mum worry, hey?" he croaked

"No, Dad," I said

Mum had been dead since I was five

Aunt Chris came to stay, to look after me she said. She was waiting on the porch when I got home She bundled Dad's beer cans into a bin bag and left it outside for the trash collectors She emptied his ashtrays and put them in the cupboard, right on the top shelf. She threw away all the old magazines and newspapers Then she started scrubbing, as though she wanted to scrub away every trace of Dad I went up to my room

Something woke me in the night The moon was heavy through the trees at the end of the garden Somewhere in the dark, an owl hooted, a forlorn, lost sound I wondered if that had been what had woken me Then I heard a scratching just below the window My heart started to thump A bird, maybe, or even a mouse. That would be it. My hands bunched into fists around the sheets I closed my eyes I wasn't a kid anymore, to be frightened by my imagination

When I opened my eyes, there was a face at the window. I nearly screamed. It was pressed up close, pale but shadowed with the moon behind it I took a deep breath. The face moved and I saw the mass of tangled hair

The wild girl pulled herself up onto my windowsill, and crouched there, staring in. "Open the window," she mouthed

Wrapping my sheet around me, I stood and hurried over

"What do you want?"

"Open the window "

I pulled it up, letting in the cool night air The girl hopped inside

"Jeez, you're hard to wake "

It's the middle of the night."

She gave me a wide grin. "You want to see something?"

What?"

"You have to come and see

I glanced at the clock It was two o'clock. I'd have to be up for school in five hours

Good," she said, before I could answer "I'll meet you downstairs. Get dressed." She giggled. "You look stupid with that sheet " Then she clambered back out onto the windowsill She lowered herself so she was dangling by her hands then looked up at me with that wild face

"You want to know my name?"

"No " I said

"It's Emma Do you like it?

"It's OK "

"Good "

She dropped, and I heard a soft thud from the ground below I saw her dart around the side of the house

I thought about going back to bed, but I just had this feeling that she'd climb back up to my window if I did. I didn't even think she would care if she woke Aunt Chris She didn't seem to care about anything

"You should cry, you know. Or scream. Or throw something." She picked up a rock and flung it toward the rooftops below "Like that Let yourself go "

We were climbing Braddock Hill, which rose sharply between the scattered houses on my side of the hill and the sprawling dirty town on the other It was cold out, and the sky was clear

"Why?" I said

"Because of your dad. You can't deal with anything while you're all sewn up like a pillow. You need to escape, let all your feathers fly around the room Then you can handle anything

"You can handle anything, can you?" I said

She jumped in the air, twirling as she did so "Anything." She laughed. It was a feral sound, like a fox barking in the darkness

We topped the hill and began to descend. The ground flattened to the left Emma led me that way, into the trees. I hung back for a moment It was dark in there. I wasn't so sure this was a good idea anymore. Emma looked back

Scared, Josh? You a stupid, scared little boy?

No," I said, and followed her in

There had been an orchard here once, but it had been long abandoned Hawthorn and ash had sprung up between the apple trees, and tangles of brambles rose in hillocks between the trunks Right in the center, larger than any of the other trees, stood a spreading crab apple tree. Nothing grew beneath its branches save a layer of thick moss

Emma stopped beneath it.

"It's a tree," I said "Big deal "

She leaned back against the bark. "Come closer" She crooked

a finger and stared up at me through her eyelashes Her sweater was tight against her chest She winked My heart trembled. My pulse fluttered loudly in my ears. My lips were dry

She pushed herself away again with a squawk of laughter

Just wait," she said, "and watch

What?"

"There " She pointed halfway up the trunks of the massive tree For a moment I couldn't see what she was pointing at. Then I saw it The bark of the tree was pulsing, as though there was a slow heart beneath it, or a giant insect trapped in syrup

The pulses grew The branches shuddered

Slowly, something pulled itself from the tree. The bark stretched like toffee, clinging to the creature that was emerging and then finally snapping back I thought of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, but this was no butterfly

It was shaped almost like a man, but it wasn't a man It was wrong. Its fingers were as long as my forearm. From its head and its elbows and its knees grew twisted twigs Its skin was as rutted as bark, but as silver as the moon Its teeth, when it spread its wide mouth open, were as sharp as pins Its eyes were bright yellow I saw claws curling from its fingers and toes It clung to the tree, and then slowly turned, so that its head was pointing downward, and began to descend

It moved with the reaching slowness of a stick insect It would take forever to reach the ground, I thought, but even as I thought that, it moved in a rush I could hardly follow, and it was standing beneath the crab apple tree, not a dozen steps away from us My breath turned to tar in my throat

The creature was male. I could see that now He wore no clothes Moonlight gathered around him like cold mist He was tall towering above me. I wanted to reach out and touch him He was beautiful He was the way I thought an angel should look, glorious, alien, and terrible

I was cold My legs shook The hairs on my arms and neck stood painfully on end. I thought he would drown me with his radiant, ugly beauty. I was dark and insignificant before him He sucked at my thoughts, leaving my head empty. I was inadequate, pathetic, scared

Through a dry mouth I said, "Who . who are you?

He was right in front of me He reached a long, twisted hand toward me, brushed sharp fingers that could slice skin across my face Suddenly, all I wanted to do was run

Crab," he said "They call me Crab

He stepped back, and Emma was beside him grinning her wide grin at me

"Isn't he beautiful?"

His cruel hand smoothed over her hair, her face, her neck, her shoulders I backed away She leaned against him, a little scrap of wildness against his terrible form

I turned and ran Behind me, I heard her cry out, "Josh Come back." But I didn't I just kept on running

Dad was asleep when I visited during the next two days

You mustn't disturb him," the nurse said "He needs all the strength he can get

So I sat beside him, holding his hand, gazing at his wasted body and his face that was so tired it looked bruised

We used to play football in the park If I scored a goal he would throw me over his shoulder like a fireman and go whooping down the pitch and dump me through the other goal I reckoned I could pick him up with one hand now he looked so frail. His breathing was a thin wheeze, in and out, in and out each breath creasing his face Once I broke down and sobbed on his chest, but he just kept wheezing in, wheezing out. His skin was as dry as a winter leaf

On the third day, he was awake, propped up on his pillows He smiled at me when I came in

"Been waiting up for you, lad," he said. "Well past my bedtime " He gasped a chuckle The effort exhausted him His eyelids fluttered almost shut, but he forced them open again "Don't let me fall asleep

How are you feeling, Dad?

"Been better, been worse "

I sat beside him. "Brought you some cards." I set them out on the table

Nice," he said. "Lad, I got my biopsy results today

What's a biopsy?"

He screwed up his old face "They stuck this tube up my nose, all the way down into my lungs, and scooped out a bit of that apple I swallowed." He coughed. "Tested it." He reached out to me with a frail hand and laid it over mine His fingers curled around mine "No surprise," he said, looking at me. "It's cancer "

My hand tightened, and he winced

Sorry," I said, but I croaked so much it barely came out

"They're going to operate " Dad said. "Take out that whole side of the lung Probably do some other stuff too. Chemothera

He reached a long, twisted hand toward me, brushed sharp fingers that could slice skin across my face

py or radiation therapy We haven't decided yet "

I couldn't move My whole body was shaking

"I'm sorry," he said. And as he did, I started to cry, big, painful sobs that shook the chair and his bed

He waited until I'd finished, and then pulled my hand closer Listen, lad, I've been wanting to say this The drink, see, it took away the pain Just thought I was getting old Didn't want to think it was this So I got drunk and tried to ignore it I'm sorry

His breath had become gasps He was sweating from his forehead His eyes were bloodshot and tinted yellow with exhaustion

Go to sleep, Dad," I said, and he did

I hadn't seen Emma at school during those three days but the day after, she was there, leaning against the lockers again, grinning at me

"Where you going?" she said

Her hair was more of a mess than ever It was full of leaves I shuddered when I thought about where they might have come from That tree. That creature in it I had tried to tell myself it was a nightmare, but I knew it wasn't My shoes had been muddy when I got back, and there were dried leaves on my

bedroom floor, near the window.

"First aid class," I said. But I didn't move, just stood there and stared at her.

"Skip it," she said.

I shrugged. "OK." There didn't seem much point in it any more. Not unless they could teach me a cure for cancer. I had no time for bandages and mouth-to-mouth.

It was lunchtime. The corridors were heaving, but no one was taking any notice of us. I grabbed Emma's arm as we let our selves be swept along toward the lunch hall.

"What is he?" I whispered. "Crab. What is he?"

He's a Dane," she said.

"What, like from Denmark?"

She rolled her eyes, and her mouth turned down. She almost hissed in my face. "No, not like from Denmark. Stupid, ugly, stupid boy. No. The Danes, like in the Fates, the People of Peace. The Fane, the Pharisees." She lowered her voice. "The Fay."

"You mean fat—"

She yanked my arm. "Don't say it! It's bad luck to say that name." She hunched her thin shoulders. "Bad luck."

"That's ridiculous," I said, but my skin wanted to shiver.

"Oh yeah," she said. "So what is he then?"

I shook my head.

"He likes you," she said. "He wants you."

I squinted at her. "What does that mean?"

She bit her lip. For an instant I thought she looked scared. "I don't know," she said. Then she stared defiantly at me again. "I don't care."

We came out into the dining room. Mr. Miller and Mrs. Wilson were on duty. Mrs. Wilson glared at us. I turned away, but Emma stuck out her tongue. Mrs. Wilson went stiff and her neck reddened.

"Why did you do that?" I whispered.

Emma shrugged. "Why not? Did you see the look she gave us? She can't stand me."

"Let's get something to eat," I said.

Emma touched my hand. I glanced at her. She looked nervous. There was a line of sweat above her lip, and her hand was trembling. She licked her lip.

"I brought you something to eat." She held out her hand. "It's an apple," she said.

It was tiny and too green. I took it from her hand.

"It's OK," she said. "It tastes fine. Eat it."

She didn't meet my eyes.

Slowly, watching her all the time, I brought it up to my mouth.

Someone put a hand on my arm. "Don't eat that."

I looked up. Mr. Miller was standing in front of me.

"That's not a real apple," he said. "It's a crab apple. It's a nasty, bitter, sour thing."

I looked at Emma. She just stared at her shoes.

"Why did you give him that, Emma?" Mr. Miller said softly.

"Because she's an evil little cow," Mrs. Wilson said from behind us.

Emma's head jerked up. "You're the evil cow," she shouted at Mrs. Wilson. "You're the evil, fat, ugly, stupid cow. You."

Emma shoved past us, out into the middle of the hall. Her body was shaking like a branch in a storm. Her arms windmilled madly around her, sending plates and trays cascading onto the floor. All the while she kept up an inhuman shriek. In the middle of it all, her eyes fixed on mine, and I could have sworn that they were no longer wood-brown, but yellow. Burning yellow.

I found her later in the schoolyard, back pressed up against the concrete wall of the science block. She was staring up at the thick woods that cloaked Braddock Hill. She had been crying.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to do any of that. It's just... it's just..."

"Just what?" I said.

She turned on me, her eyes narrowed to slits.

"Nothing. It's nothing. Dull, stupid, ugly boy. Go away, go away." She leaped to her feet and ran.

"

Mrs. Tully from school says you've got a new friend," Dad said. "What's her name?"

"Emma."

"What's she like, hey?" He winked.

"Wild," I said, sighing.

"Wild, hey?" He laughed, his breathless laugh.

Sunday afternoon, and dying summer had decided to throw up one final, wonderful, hot day. The air was still and clean, the sky a ferocious blue.

Emma was waiting at the garden gate. She wore jeans and a light, long-sleeved t-shirt.

"Want to walk?" she said.

"Not to the orchard," I said.

"No." She shivered as though a spider was crawling up her back. "Not to the orchard."

We climbed the path that led around the other side of Braddock Hill. The Somerset levels were laid out before us, lush green and gently rumpled. Hundreds of irregularly sized fields,

She turned on me, pimply to her feet. Her brown eyes had turned yellow. Her face was twisted.

divided by head-high hawthorn and blackthorn hedges studded with ash, oak, and hazel stretched to the rise of the Mendip Hills in the distance. Sunlight glittered from the streams and drainage ditches, like trails of mercury laid on green felt. Gray stone farmhouses were dotted here and there. Once every one of them would have had an orchard. Not any more.

We walked close, almost touching, arms brushing once or twice.

"Is your dad going to die?" Emma said.

My throat turned to miserable stone. "Maybe. I guess."

"Oh."

She stared into my eyes. Hers were wide and that deep, swallowing brown. "I don't think I'll die," she said. I could hardly hear her voice. "But... but I think it might be worse."

I touched her shoulder.

"I want to help you," I said. "If I can."

She shook her head "You can t ' she whispered "He's inside me

I could try If you told me how

I thought she might cry

'Let's get out of the sun It's too bright " She pointed to a stand of trees

We sat in the shade, our backs against a tall oak, sharing the Pepsi and Mars Bar she d brought with her. I could hear insects buzzing, but they left us alone The air was so clear it might not even have been there

I glanced over at Emma She was staring far out over the levels, watching something I couldn't see Her face was peaceful, relaxed She had a twig sticking out her hair I reached up and pulled it to get it out It snapped off Her head jerked forward and she screamed. Sap—and a single drop of blood—welled up in the broken twig

She turned on me, jumping to her feet Her brown eyes had turned yellow Her face was twisted I scrambled to my feet too I grabbed her arm and pulled up the sleeve. The skin below was wrinkled, hard, and silvery I felt sweat under my collar, on my hands

You're becoming like him, like Crab," I shouted. "Aren t you? Aren't you?'

She swung for me. Fingernails like claws scraped along my arm I jumped back

Keep away from me, Josh. Keep away

She turned and was gone, into the trees

I didn't see her again until the end of the month Dad came home for a couple of weeks His operation wasn't scheduled for three months, and the hospital said he was strong enough to be discharged He didn't look it. His skin was pallid and unhealthy I could see his veins through it He couldn't walk more than about four steps without panting

Aunt Chris cut her way through the jungle that was the back garden, uprooting weeds, cutting back plants, while Dad sat and glowered from the window

Thursday evening, at the end of his second week home, Dad had to go back in for tests Aunt Chris went with him. I sat at home, by the phone, waiting for one of them to call At ten, the phone rang It was Aunt Chris

Listen, Joshua," she said. "We're staying here overnight." I heard her voice tremble. "They ... they say the cancer has begun to metastasize It's begun to spread. They re going to operate tomorrow at two

I want to come in " I said

Tomorrow," she said "He's got to sleep now '

I stood and went to the window and stared out across the moonlit garden

It took me several minutes to notice the shape at the end of the garden, because it didn't move, but then I saw it for what it was. A person, standing rigid, half-hidden by shadows

I went to the door and opened it, stepped out

Her head snapped around It was Emma I'd known it would be

Stay away from me, Josh," she hissed, then turned and ran

This time I wasn't going to let her get away I followed her She ran fast, keeping to the shadows at the side of the road, but I knew where she was going. To the orchard. To Crab. I dashed after her

I was out of breath by the time I reached the orchard My lungs were raw and my throat painful. I saw her standing beneath the crab apple tree, staring up

She turned, and in the moonlight I saw her clearly Her fingers were too long Twisted sticks poked from her head and elbows and knees. Her skin was silver and creased like the bark of a tree Her eyes were burning yellow, bright in the darkness. Her teeth were pointed and sharp

"Josh

Above her, the bark of the tree began to pulse and bulge

I ran toward her She hissed, and her razor-sharp claws darted at my throat I threw myself back, and she followed. There was nothing of Emma in those eyes

She swung again, and I ducked, feeling the claws slice through my hair. I punched My fist caught her jaw. She stumbled back

She blinked For a moment her eyes were brown again I saw panic and fear in them

'Let me help you," I shouted

Crab had freed one of his twisted limbs from the bark of the tree. His head was turning to peer down at us

"Get it out of me, Josh," Emma whispered, her voice cracking 'Get him out of me

She started to cough, great choking coughs that shook her whole body Then her eyes turned yellow again

Before she could move, I darted behind her and grabbed her, my arms circling her body Above us, Crab freed his last limb and began to descend

Emma's claws raked my arms. Blood trickled over my skin I bunched one hand into a fist, crossed the other over it Emma was struggling, lashing her twisted body to and fro, screaming But still she was coughing, and still I held her tight

A thud, and Crab landed in front of us He rose, his radiance growing For a moment I felt weak, scared, pathetic. His magnificence was like a ton of sand, pushing down on me, burying me My arms weakened, and I almost let go But then I remembered Emma's frightened brown eyes, and I knew I wouldn't let him take her

Ignoring the pain and fear and weakness, I pushed my fist below her ribs, the way they'd shown us in first aid class, and jerked it upward in time with her cough

Her body convulsed and she choked, gasped Something flew from her mouth. We collapsed forward together

Lying on the moss, still damp from her saliva, was a small green crab apple

I looked up Crab was standing there above us. But he no longer looked fearsome or terrible He looked lonely He looked like an old, old branch of a tree that had broken off and fallen His yellow eyes gazed down at us Then he turned and climbed back into his crab apple tree

"I'll be honest with you," the doctor said, looking down at me over his little glasses "Your dad's got a twenty percent chance, at most We've got to get the whole cancer out in one go '

Emma and I sat side by side. We had just seen Dad's trolley being pushed into the operating theater. They wheeled him away like they'd wheeled Mum away when I was five She never came back

The doctor gave us a nod and then disappeared through the door

My throat was hard My teeth were clamped tight shut I had to close my eyes to stop tears coming

"Twenty percent," I whispered That's no chance at all He's going to die

I felt Emma reach for me and take my hand She pushed something solid and round into it I opened my eyes It was the crab apple, whole, undamaged, out of her She was smiling a wild, free smile I smiled back and clasped her hand

We sat, the crab apple held pressed between our palms, and waited for the doctors to come back out ❧

the GOOD DOCTOR

Philosophers have proposed that ethical behavior provides the greatest good for the greatest number. Sometimes this can be much more difficult in practice than in history.

BY MELISSA LEE SHAW

Just before dawn, Paolo Amarú's wife reached for him

He was already awake when she slipped into his mosquitero—his mosquito-netting–covered mattress—though he did not move Her fingers were tentative, soft, as if she were trying to stir his body without awakening his mind

He allowed her to touch him, to stroke his side, his hip, his leg In the dark, he could pretend she loved him

Growing bolder, her hands slid over his shoulder, down his chest, toward his groin His body tingled deliciously, but—he pushed her arm away

"Sierra, my love," he said "You know we can't "

Sierra pulled back, flopped onto the bed in a huff. "I know you can't," she retorted "Just my luck that that ugly foot isn't your only shortcoming "

Ignoring the sting of her words, he sat up and rubbed his gritty eyes. He lit the lantern beside the bed

"Paolo, wait," she said. He glanced back to see her lying naked, the soft light burnishing her coppery skin. The volumes of her dark hair sprawled like waves around her head. Against the hazy background of the mosquito netting, she looked dreamlike, luminous. She curled toward him and laid her chin on his leg, looked up into his eyes. "Please, my husband. Just one more child. For me.'

So beautiful and compelling was she that he could not help but stroke her soft cheek with his fingertips. "You have your hands full with the . three we have " Four, he'd been about to say

She glared at him "You don't care how my heart breaks A baby at my breast—it is the only thing that will mend my heart. But you don't care at all I should never have married such a selfish man " She rolled away from him

He dressed quickly and picked up the lantern, stopping, as always, at the doorway to the children's room They sprawled together like sleeping puppies. His chest twisted with love, with fear. So precious, so fragile

Santa Solangia lay isolated in the tropical forests of eastern Bolivia, three days' horseback ride from the nearest village accessible by truck. It originated as a poor campesino—rural Indian—village whose residents worked for a cocalero with a modest coca-leaf plantation. But in the turbulent political climate of the early 1960's the cocalero made the mistake of lending his vocal and financial support to President Paz Estenssoro. In 1965, four months after Estenssoro's vice president, General René Barrientos, seized control of the country, the cocalero disappeared during a business trip to Santa Cruz and was never heard from again. His wife waited with fading hopes for nearly a year, until a swarm of army men appeared out of the forest and destroyed every last coca plant with machetes, shovels, and fire, then vanished once more. The cocalero's wife packed up her children and moved back to Beni, where her family was from.

A village always wracked by poverty, Santa Solangia descended into despair as its inhabitants tried to remake their lives after being abandoned by their one source of income. They staked out small subsistence farms where the coca used to grow, constantly pushing back the encroaching forest.

Two young men sought their fortunes outside the village. One returned with permanent hearing loss from the beating he got when he ran afoul of a militia which had no use for campesinos. The other vanished. His fate unknown. Life in Santa Solangia was difficult, but it cost it was a known quantity. Dangerous as the forest itself was, the world outside was clearly more dangerous still.

The Santa Solangians spent the next two decades getting by as best they could, farming potatoes, corn, chilies, and vegetables, and raising what few chickens they could keep from disease and the occasional forays of ocelots. But year by year, their numbers—and their hopes—dwindled.

Until the doctor came.

In the light of the newly-risen sun, the whitewashed clinic building stood straight and proud, in contrast to the ramshackle baled thatch houses that sprawled nearby. Paolo stooped to pick up a handful of wildflowers and a cloth-wrapped bundle left in front of the bronze statuette of the Madre de Dios, just beside the clinic's door. Inside, he set his crutch against his desk and tucked the flowers in with the bunch already wilting in the clay pot atop the filing cabinet.

The doctor had left no notes on his desk, the clinic must have been quiet last night. Paolo had barely unwrapped the bundle—tomatoes, and some ripe red chilies—when Rosalind burst into the clinic. She half led and half-dragged her ten-year-old son, Mateo, up to Paolo's desk. "You must help him," she pleaded. "He refuses to eat, and he soaks the mattress with his sweat at night. And when he coughs—there is blood."

Paolo brought Mateo into one of the clinic's four hospital rooms and examined him while Rosalind looked on anxiously. The boy looked thin and listless. Jotting notes on a chart, Paolo asked Mateo, "How long has there been blood when you cough?"

Rosalind said, "It started—" but Paolo held up a hand to silence her. Looking back at Mateo, he said, "How long."

"Two days," Mateo said.

To Rosalind, Paolo said, "You should have brought him in last night. While the doctor was still here. If it's tuberculosis, you endanger your whole family by waiting." He had the boy he back in one of the room's two wheeled cots.

"Can't you give him something so he can come home?" Rosalind twisted her hands in the ends of her orange and yellow shawl.

"I don't know what's wrong with him, but he could be contagious. I must quarantine him until the doctor can diagnose him."

Rosalind nodded slowly. "He's a fine doctor."

"The finest. All will be well."

"Here," Rosalind said, pushing a cloth-wrapped package toward Paolo. The aroma of warm salteñas, spicy meat pies filled with chicken, peas, eggs, and potatoes, reminded Paolo he hadn't eaten breakfast. "You watch over my Mateo."

Uncomfortably, Paolo said, "He is in God's hands."

Rosalind kissed the crucifix she wore around her neck, crossed herself, and left.

The day wore on, growing hotter and muggier. A steady stream of minor complaints—skin rashes, mysterious pains, upset stomachs—paraded through the clinic. At mid-day, when most villagers took their siesta, Paolo was at his busiest, since that was when everyone stopped working their farms long enough to attend to their physical ailments.

During the late afternoon lull, Quizo, a gray-haired campesino, and his young wife Marca came in. At forty-seven, Quizo was one of Santa Solangia's oldest residents. Five years ago, he had buried his first wife.

Paolo smiled at the couple and gestured toward the hallway. "Shall we?"

Inside one of the hospital rooms, a newborn infant lay inside an incubator, her chest swathed in bandages, tubes running into her nose and arms.

"She's doing well," Paolo said, checking the nasal-gastric tube and the oxygen flow. Too much oxygen, the doctor had told him, could burst the capillaries in the baby's eyes and blind her. "No signs of infection, and she's gaining weight."

Marca's hands trembled. "I want to hold her. Ah, my little darling."

"It's not safe yet," Paolo said. "A few more days."

"I thought it was her lungs that made her so blue," Quizo murmured. "But the doctor, he knew right away what it was."

"It was a miracle," Marca said. "He's a miracle-healer, that one."

"Neither of our other two had holes in their hearts," Quizo said. "Little Siza, she will always bear a scar, won't she? How can she ever grow up strong now?"

Annoyed, Paolo said, "You'd be surprised how children can adapt to hardship."

Quizo stole a glance at Paolo's club foot and stammered, "I—I'm sorry, I didn't mean—"

Paolo said, "The doctor says Siza will be fine. And now...." He ushered them back into the front room, to the donation station.

"Such a great man, the doctor," Quizo said reverently, rolling up his sleeve and sitting down. Marca sat next to him to wait her turn, her legs bobbing anxiously.

Paolo swiped Quizo's arm with an alcohol-soaked cotton ball. "How is your farm?" he asked, trying to distract him from the needle sliding into his wiry brown arm.

Quizo shrugged. "My potatoes, they have something wrong with them. Tomas tells me I must destroy them so the disease does not spread, but how can I? If I do, there will be no food for my children."

Paolo said, "You've seen Tomas?"

Quizo's face tightened.

"Next time you see him, tell him he still owes for when the doctor sewed up his foot, last month. Tell him if he does not come within a week, the doctor will require twice as much donation. And

> Her fingers were tentative, soft, as if she were trying to stir his body without awakening his mind.

if he does not come in willingly the doctor will be forced to take action."

Quizo shifted uneasily. "His foot, it got infected. That's why he hasn't donated."

"If it got infected, it's because he took the bandage off and got dirt in it, which I told him not to do," Paolo said. "He owes anyway. You know it's for the good of the village, that's why the doctor started the blood bank."

Quizo grunted.

"That's a shame about your potatoes."

Quizo shrugged again. "When you cannot change things, you must adapt. We will survive."

A tall, stooped man burst through the front door of the clinic. "Emergency," he said in strangely accented Spanish. "By the river, a woman—she's badly hurt. Come, quickly!"

The man wasn't a villager, but he looked familiar. Ah, one of the doctor's men, from the estancia. Paolo withdrew the needle from Quizo's arm and levered himself to his feet, reaching for his wooden crutch and his emergency medical bag. "How far?"

"Two miles? Three? I have a horse for you—hurry!"

"What happened?"

"Caimano attack. Her leg, it's badly torn, maybe broken. She's lost a lot of blood."

Paolo turned to Marca. "Find Salvador. Tell him to bring his cart to the river. Run!"

She ran.

Paolo crutched his way back into the clinic, toward the supply room.

"What are you doing?" the doctor's man shouted.

"Getting plasma." A delicious blast of cool air struck Paolo as he opened the refrigerator door in the storage room and retrieved two clear plastic bags filled with pale yellowish liquid.

Outside, two saddled horses stood, sides heaving, their brown necks dark with sweat. The stranger grabbed the medical bag and the crutch, boosting Paolo into the saddle so hard he nearly fell off the other side. They took off at a gallop.

At the riverbank, the doctor's man jerked his blowing, foam-flecked horse to a halt.

Paolo's horse stopped too. Head swimming, he slid to the mossy ground. His legs buckled beneath him; he had to grab the saddle to keep from falling.

"Here!" called the doctor's man from behind his horse.

Paolo's weakened knees threatened to collapse. "My crutch!"

The doctor's man appeared and thrust the crutch under his armpit. Anxiously, he said, "She fell off the raft. The caimano grabbed her. I hit it in the eye with the pole."

As he moved around the man's horse, Paolo heard the soft sobbing, a child trying to be brave. He stopped, startled.

A pale, chubby, sniffling girl of about ten huddled beside her mother's unconscious body, holding one limp hand. A coat wrapped one of the woman's legs, dark red soaked the ground beneath. The woman's hair, blonde as wheat chaff, lay plastered to her head in wet curls. Her skin looked sickly pale.

A rifle lay across the girl's lap. Her wet eyes were a grayish green, like lake water on a rainy day. She looked up and babbled at them, incomprehensibly. English?

"I gave her the rifle," the doctor's man said. "To scare off any other caimanos."

You left a little girl alone with caimanos around?"

"She wouldn't leave her mother! The attack happened on the other side of the river. I thought she would be safe here."

The man had already tied a makeshift rope tourniquet around the woman's thigh, twisting the rope around a short stick to tighten it. Paolo loosened it gradually for a few minutes, checking for signs of increased bleeding. As he worked, the man said, "Her name is Susan Chase. The doctor sent me to escort her to his estancia—she had a business meeting with him tomorrow. She works for some big American company, they want to talk to him about buying his local oil wells."

"I thought the doctor had a helicopter. Why didn't he just fly her to his estancia? Here, hold this." He retrieved a plasma bag from inside his shirt and handed it to the man, starting the warmed plasma running into the woman's arm. "Keep that bag elevated. Don't let the line kink."

"I don't think he wants it to be that easy for anyone to reach him. He says if her company wants to talk to him that badly, they can work for it." The man's shoulders slumped. "I was to keep her safe," he whispered.

By the time Paolo got the unconscious woman settled into a bed at the clinic, the sun hung low on the horizon. Salvador, whose cart and oxen had brought the woman here, glanced at the girl, Angie. She stood staring at nothing, one white hand resting on her mother's arm. Something purple and sparkling bound her honey-colored hair in a ponytail.

In a low voice, Salvador said, "What about the gringita?"

Paolo added a second IV line for full-spectrum antibiotics. Caimano bites were nasty, filled with bacteria from the rotting flesh of previous meals.

Salvador said, "Carlota butchered a chicken today. She's making a good stew." He coughed, caught Paolo's eye. "We have room. I can come for the gringita when I'm done in the fields."

Paolo said, "Hand me that blanket."

ANGIE, THE GRINGITA, SPRAWLED IN THE CHAIR BY HER mother's bedside, her head resting on the mattress. Asleep. Where was Salvador?

The familiar thud of a cane on the dirt road outside jarred him. The front door swung open. Paolo looked out the window. Full dark. Too late.

The doctor was here.

Paolo came out into the front room. "A new patient, Doctor Baudouin. Your man told you? Susan Chase. She was to meet with you tomorrow."

"Apparently," the doctor said, "she will meet with me sooner." He was completely bald, his skin smooth and muted brown, like unpolished wood. "Francis and I have … discussed his failure."

"Rosalind's son Mateo is here too, he's sick. The gringa—she's unconscious. I've prepped her for surgery."

"Is she stable?"

"I think so."

"You think so," the doctor admonished. "Have I taught you so little that you can't tell if a patient is stable?"

Paolo took a deep, invisible breath. "She is stable." He hesitated. "Her daughter is with her."

"Daughter?"

"Francis didn't mention the daughter?"

With a wolfish smile, the doctor said, "Perhaps he did not have the opportunity. Our … conversation was quite brief."

Salvador pushed through the front door. "Don Baudouin," he said, lowering his eyes.

The doctor looked back and forth between Salvador and Paolo. "Where is this daughter?"

"I can take her with me," Salvador blurted. "She won't trouble you." He made for the woman's hospital room, but the doctor held out his cane, blocking Salvador's way.

With a smile, the doctor said, "What's the rush?" He pushed open the door. Angie didn't stir. "She looks exhausted, poor thing. It would be cruel to wake her."

"As you say," Salvador said, twisting his hands in front of him. "And yet, she must be hungry. She hasn't eaten for many hours."

The doctor considered. "All right. But give her only boiled water to drink, and well cooked food. These little gringitas—they are not so hardy as Bolivian children."

Salvador squeezed past the doctor and gently laid a hand on

Angie's shoulder. He spoke to her soothingly, but she pulled back, disoriented and alarmed. She said something. Salvador smiled and raised his hands to show he didn't understand.

The doctor spoke up. English. Angie turned to him, teary with relief. They babbled at each other. With a final fearful glance at her mother, the girl allowed Salvador to shepherd her out of the room. The doctor's implacable eyes followed her out.

Paolo said, "The woman, she works for a big company. Should something happen to either of them... "

"Something already has happened to them. Bolivia has happened to them. Come, assist me."

As always, Paolo was amazed at the doctor's speed and skill in surgery. His fingers flew like dragonfly wings, always sure of themselves, always right. When Paolo grew too tired to assist, the doctor sent him to a bed in the clinic's one unoccupied room. He awoke to find the doctor standing over him, shaking pills out of dark brown bottles. "Take these," the doctor said.

What are they for?" Paolo asked. He squinted at the bottles. Isoniazid, Pyridoxine.

"Mateo has tuberculosis. You've been exposed. These will prevent you from catching it too."

"How is he?" Paolo asked.

"He'll be all right," the doctor said. "We must keep him quarantined here for a while. No visits from anyone, including his mother. And it's vital that you find out who he caught it from. Otherwise, the whole village could become infected. It'll likely be an adult, children rarely catch it from each other."

"Then why quarantine him?"

The doctor frowned. "Are you questioning my wisdom?"

"No, no, I'm sorry. I just want to understand."

"We're quarantining Mateo because it's vital to isolate all potential causes of a full-blown TB outbreak. I've left drugs on your desk for you to send home for his whole family."

Paolo yawned. "The gringa, she will be all right?"

"We'll see. Not everyone recovers from a cavitario attack." The doctor laughed at Paolo's expression.

"Doctor—"

The doctor interrupted. "How is your wife, Paolo?"

After a beat, Paolo said, "She is well."

"And your three children?"

Paolo had to take a breath to steady himself. "They are also well."

"Your boy Niklas, he is what, eight now?"

Not trusting his voice, Paolo nodded.

"A lovely age, eight. Still a child, but showing hints of the man he will become. Full of promise. A beautiful age."

Paolo's vision went white-hot, like the noon sun in the dead of muggy summer. He could barely breathe.

"Don't forget yourself, Juju," the doctor said softly.

Juju. Son. Paolo's face burned at the implicit collusion.

The doctor picked up the chart at the foot of the bed and flipped it open. "Speak to Salvador tomorrow. The garden needs tending. You may go, Paolo."

Trees rose tall in the brick-walled garden behind the clinic: bushy, glossy-leafed mahogany, aromatic, evergreen cedar. Up above, a thick canopy of leaves and needles rustled and swayed, casting a muted green light on the flowers below, even in the bright early morning sun.

The trees' rough bark was nearly invisible behind the gnarled gray-green roots of the hundreds of orchids that clung to them. A riot of colors—deep crimson, waxy white, delicate butter-yellow, cream-streaked purple—burst in clusters around each trunk.

Paolo pulled at the vines that crawled up the tree trunks and threatened to displace the orchids. He could have asked Salvador to take care of it, but working outdoors would do him good.

It was a peaceful place, the garden—thirty feet on a side, fenced in on three sides by a tall brick wall, on the fourth by the clinic. The gas generator shed stood against the clinic wall.

Paolo remembered walking here with Gustavo, no more than a year ago. The boy had been fascinated by the brilliantly colored blooms sprouting from the tree trunks, like a cavalcade of sleeping butterflies.

Gustavo, his little man, his firstborn son. Only a few months ago, against Paolo's wishes, Sierra had brought ten-year-old Gustavo to the clinic one night with a terrible, itchy rash. Paolo had told her they should wait, she had retorted that it was easy for him to say, since he didn't spend his whole day listening to Gustavo whine and cry. She had been certain that somehow, the children of the doctor's own assistant would be immune to . . . to death.

The doctor had kept Gustavo there overnight. The next morning, the boy had come home pale and moody. A week later, he vanished in the middle of the night. They never even found his body. Wild dogs, the villagers said, nodding sadly. It had happened before.

It was then that Paolo started sleeping apart from Sierra, in a separate mosquitero. She thought he was just angry, but there was another reason: he could not bear to bring another child into this world, knowing what might happen. Each child was another shackle around his heart, another hand silencing his mouth.

Paolo dug fertilizer—the doctor's special, hand-mixed combination of ash, blood meal, and well-rotted compost—into the dirt around the tree roots. The dusty, fertile smell overpowered the orchids' faint sweet fragrance. These particular orchids, cultivated for generations by the doctor's family, were parasites. It was important, the doctor had told him, to replenish the nutrients that the orchids sapped from the trees. There was no reason both trees and orchids could not thrive.

Paolo glanced over at the squat brick building, a short distance away from the gardening shed that abutted the clinic's rear wall. The furnace building. The doctor always insisted that Salvador keep the woodpile outside it well stocked. Every now and then, the doctor would vanish inside and smoke would pour from the chimney for many hours. A small burlap sack would appear outside the furnace building's door, for Salvador to mix with the fertilizer. Not even Paolo had seen the inside of the furnace building, the doctor had the only key. He used to be curious about the building. Now, like the other villagers, he avoided it.

While he was washing his hands in a cool stream of water from the pump next to the gardening shed, he heard Salvador's voice out front. "Paolo! Paolo, where are you?"

Paolo knocked gravel off his sandals and limped back through the clinic. Salvador stood at the front desk, carrying the gringita Angie—in his arms. She looked exhausted, her eyes sunken. Out of habit, Paolo glanced at the sky outside. Late morning.

"She can't keep anything down," Salvador said. "Not since she woke up."

"This way," Paolo said, gesturing for Salvador to lay her down on the bed beside her mother's. "What has she eaten?"

"Fried chuño and onions. Boiled water, as you said."

Chuño—a dehydrated potato dish, relatively bland. "You're sure that's all?"

Salvador hesitated.

The girl began retching. Paolo handed her a kidney-shaped metal pan and ushered Salvador out of the room.

Sharply, Paolo said, "If I'm to treat her, I must know everything."

Salvador wouldn't meet Paolo's eyes. "Carlota—she gave her runny eggs for breakfast."

"How old were the eggs?"

"Who can say? The kitchen is a woman's place." Salvador looked troubled, restless. "I must go, Carlota needs me."

"I think maybe it's food poisoning," Paolo told the doctor when he arrived that evening. "She is very ill, drifting in and out of consciousness. Fever, vomiting, diarrhea with a little blood. And she's in

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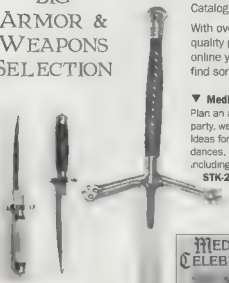

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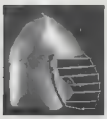

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a great deal of pain. I started IV fluids as soon as she came in."

Without a word, Dr. Baudouin strode past him and into Angie's room. He hooked his cane on the railing at the foot of her bed. "Hm," he said thoughtfully. He laid his hand on her damp forehead, then snuffed his fingers. He touched her bluish lips and pressed gently on her abdomen. When he lifted her arm, she moaned and pulled back.

Dengue fever," the doctor said. "She must have contracted it in La Paz, there's a small outbreak there now. There's no cure. You did well to start her on IV fluids. They are her best hope."

It wasn't food poisoning. Carlota hadn't hurt the girl. "Will she be all right?"

"Difficult to say."

"What can we do for her?"

The doctor looked at him in amusement. "You can do nothing but go home. She's in my hands now."

Usually, when Paolo walked in the door, his youngest, Rosa, flung herself on him, shrieking and giggling. Sierra always rolled her eyes and told him not to indulge her so, or she would grow up spoiled. Tonight, however, all three of his children sat quietly at the kitchen table, looking glum. Sierra sat in the corner sewing cream-colored lace onto a blue woolen dress. She didn't look up when he came in.

Why the sad faces?" Paolo asked. "Has something happened?"

Rosa turned mournful brown eyes up at him. "Papa—I miss Gustavo."

A flash of pain coursed through Paolo. He lowered himself into a chair.

Me too," said Niklas, the middle child. "Girls don't know how to wrestle."

Paolo said, "Rosa, come here." Rosa glanced at her mother, then went to him. He lifted her into his lap. Five years old, she seemed nearly weightless. "I miss Gustavo too. We all do."

Rosa pressed her cheek to his neck. "Can we have another brother? Please?"

"Rosa, look at me."

She looked up at him uneasily.

"What did your mother say she would give you if you asked me for another brother?"

Mariana, the eldest, said, "Papa, we—"

Paolo said, "Keep quiet. I'm speaking to your sister. No, Rosa, don't look at your mother. Answer the question."

Sierra didn't look up, but her hands stopped moving.

Rosa said, "Nothing, papa."

"Nothing?"

Nothing much."

"What is this nothing much?" Rosa twisted on his lap like a bored puppy, but he held her in place. He let his voice become a little harder. "Rosa. Tell me or I will spank you."

In a small voice, she said, "She said she would make sugared tawa-tawas. But only if you said yes."

Paolo kissed the top of Rosa's head and set her on the ground. "Children, go into your room. I need to speak with your mother."

They filed out reluctantly, glancing at Sierra, who lifted her chin high.

Paolo said, "How cruel you are, to use our children like this."

"Cruel? You think you know cruelty? Try being a woman whose husband finds her so ugly he will not touch her! You're probably out screwing some younger woman who's still impressed that you're the doctor's assistant. Or—or maybe that new gringa is prettier than I am."

She's heard of the gringa already, Paolo thought. News travels fast.

"Paolo, living like this, it is killing me! It has been four months since Gustavo—since we lost him. Until there's a new baby, we will all be stuck in this grief! The children, they need a bigger family. They're so young, and life is so uncertain! How can you want any of them to be alone in the world when we are gone?"

He said, "We've been over and over this. There will be no more children in this house. That is final."

She set her sewing aside. Her eyes acquired a dangerous gleam. Is it, Paolo? Perhaps I should go out and take a lover too—a hand some man, with a strong body. Since you don't care about your family, it won't bother you if my new baby's eyes are like some other man's!"

He recoiled as if slapped. For all that he was the most powerful man in the village—after the doctor, of course—inside, he still felt like the crippled boy who hobbled along on a crutch while the other children ran and leaped and tumbled. And yet—how he loved Sierra, even in her rage, her lovely hazel eyes flashing, her coiled black hair coming out of its bun and framing her face.

"You don't know," he managed to choke out. "You don't know how much I care about our family, about you."

"Then show me!" she said. "Give me what I need!"

He slumped back in his chair. "I'm hungry."

"I suppose you expect me to feed you, like a servant!" She stormed out of the house, into the street.

"No," he said to the empty room, suddenly exhausted. "Like a wife."

When Paolo limped into the clinic before dawn the next day, he didn't immediately see the doctor. He unwrapped the packages he'd found by the little shrine outside the door—seared corn on the cob and fresh potatoes and onions. He went to check on the gringas, leaving back the door to their room.

The doctor stood beside the unconscious girl's bed, pressing the inside of her wrist to his mouth. Dread seeped through Paolo like rainwater through a leaky roof. The doctor looked up at him without releasing the small pale arm, his eyes mocking.

A movement caught Paolo's eye. The sleeping gringa stirred, blinked heavily. Her eyes fixed briefly on the doctor's back.

The doctor glanced over at the woman. A few moments later, he laid the girl's hand down on the bed. He licked his lips, then laughed at Paolo's alarm. "She's been in and out of consciousness all day," he said. "I'm sure she's had some very strange dreams."

Looking at the floor, Paolo said, "Doctor, is—is dengue fever contagious?"

"Not unless you're a mosquito, no. Why?"

Paolo's vision went white-hot, like the noon sun in the dead of muggy summer. He could barely breathe.

"I just wondered if we should move the gringita to another room. Isolate her, like Mateo."

It's not necessary."

Well, perhaps we should move her anyway."

Are we worried, Paolo?"

Paolo's eyes flicked to the mother.

The doctor chuckled. "Fine, move the girl. It's all the same to me. But first—come with me." He led Paolo into the hallway and closed the door. "Did you know, Paolo, that I received a phone call from the United States today, on my cellular phone? A Chicago hospital. They've offered me a position there, supervising physician of the night shift. And do you know what's even more remarkable? The gentleman I spoke with explained that he understands my situa-

tion, and promised to make certain accommodations for my special needs. That's how he put it, my 'special needs.'"

A deep, primal fear tightened Paolo's windpipe. "You're not thinking of going, are you?" His voice sounded high, tinny.

"Perhaps it's time I move on, eh, hijo? To someplace that appreciates me and my unique gifts. Someplace more accommodating."

"But—but we need you here!"

"Yes," the doctor said. "You do."

Paolo's skin prickled. After twenty years, he knew when the doctor was about to do something unpleasant.

"Sometimes, Paolo, a doctor is forced to make difficult decisions. Sometimes he must choose where to invest his time and medicines. It is not always possible to save everyone. If you were a doctor, and you were faced with the choice between these two children—Mateo and Angie—which would you save?"

Paolo said, "I would try to save them both."

"But if you couldn't. If they were both badly injured and you had to choose which to attend to, knowing the other would die—which would you choose?"

"I don't know, I suppose it would depend on the nature of their injuries and which seemed to have the better chance—"

"Paolo."

Paolo took a breath. He was so tired. "I don't know."

"You do. Which would you choose?"

"There would be repercussions either way," Paolo said. "If the gringita died, her rich mother might bring the government in to investigate. There could be a lot of trouble, for you—for all of us. I know you wouldn't want that."

"And Mateo?"

"If Mateo died—well, his family might resent that a stranger lived at the expense of one of their own. There could be unrest. Either way, there would be a risk."

"So which would you save?"

"I would . . . I would save the gringita," Paolo said, then stumbled away.

As the sun climbed and the day heated, a tentative call came from the back. Señora Chase was finally awake.

Paolo hastened to her room to introduce himself and explain what had happened. His stomach twisted when he had to tell her that her little girl was at the clinic too, with dengue fever. Her response shocked him.

With a scowl, she said, "Kids. One damned thing after another. I knew bringing her along was a mistake." Her Spanish was heavily accented.

Paolo struggled to keep his composure. "Then why did you?"

She looked him square in the eye. "Because it's Señorita Chase, not Señora. There was no one else to look after her. And you can call me Susan, by the way." Gruffly, she said, "Can I see her?"

He fetched both wheelchair and crutches from the back room. "Later today, you can try moving around a little with the crutches. It's important for your recovery to keep the blood moving in your legs."

He helped her into the wheelchair, hanging her IV bags on its tall metal pole. Her face tightened when her bandaged leg bumped the footrest, but she didn't complain.

Angie was asleep but looking better, though the doctor had told him to watch the girl's breathing; she was still getting a lot of morphine to combat the bone-breaking pain in her limbs caused by the dengue fever.

"It seems the doctor has worked another of his miracles," Paolo said.

"She looks awful," Susan said.

"You should have seen her when she arrived. Trust me, she looks better. She is lucky—many children don't survive dengue fever." Paolo locked himself as soon as the words were out of his mouth.

"Just figures," she said. "I'm here to do business, and she's got to go and get sick. They're such a nuisance, kids. You have kids?"

Nuisance, he thought, appalled. As if any of his children could be a nuisance. As if Gustavo had been a nuisance. "I have . . . three children, yes. They are—they are my heart."

Susan was staring at a dark spot on Angie's wrist. A tiny scab. "What's that?"

"It's nothing," Paolo said hastily. "I need to start an IV there. I could not find a vein." He started wheeling her back to her own room.

Susan frowned. "I thought I saw—never mind. This damned leg, it's making me jumpy. Listen, you have a washcloth and some water?"

At lunchtime, Sierra showed up at the clinic with Rosalind, Carlota, Marca, and Ines, all clad in their finest dresses and carrying woven baskets. Appetizing smells wafted forth.

"What's this?" Paolo said, his heart leaping.

Sierra smiled, though her face was hard, like a doll's. "We heard our guest is awake. We wanted to show her Santa Solangia's friendly side, not just her dangers. So we brought her food."

Carlota looked back and forth between Paolo and Sierra. "We brought some for you too, of course, Paolo," she said.

"It's a kind thought," Paolo said, rising. "Let me check on her and see if she's ready for company."

At first, Susan was taken aback by the idea of visitors, but Paolo assured her the village women only wanted to welcome her. He promised not to let them stay too long.

In the hallway, Paolo warned the women, "She cannot eat much. Don't try to stuff her. I know how you can be."

"Oh, Paolo," Sierra said, brushing past him. "You fuss like a hen."

Susan tried to sample each dish, but she kept exclaiming at how spicy everything was. She picked at the rice that wasn't covered with salsa criolla, and she seemed to like the chuño phuti, a side dish made of dehydrated potato, onion, and eggs. Sierra saved her dish for last, triumphantly announcing, "Today, we have beef!" But the Ají de Lengua—thin slices of cow tongue in a heavy, spicy sauce—made Susan blanch. Ignoring the venomous look Sierra shot at him, Paolo suggested that perhaps Susan had eaten enough for her first meal in two days.

"So tell me about this Dr. Baudouin," Susan said. "Where's he from?"

Paolo said, "Somewhere in Europe. I think Belgium, perhaps."

"And what brought him to Santa Solangia? No offense, but this place isn't exactly a hub of commerce. My cell phone hasn't gotten reception since I left La Paz. What's a European doctor doing here?"

"Some people prefer not to live in a hub of commerce," Sierra said. "Bolivia is a beautiful country, and the dollars earned elsewhere go far here. Perhaps he prefers a simpler life."

"It's an unusual clinic, yes? For this part of Bolivia?"

"For anywhere," Sierra said proudly. "Our Dr. Baudouin is one of the finest doctors in the world."

"I'm sure he is. Has he lived here long?"

"Oh, about twenty years."

Susan turned to Paolo. "And you've worked for him that whole time?"

Paolo nodded. "When I was fifteen, my father went to him with a bad pain in his chest. He was so impressed with the doctor's treatment that he offered to have me work at the clinic. I've been assisting the doctor ever since."

"You can't imagine what it was like before he came," said Ines, the oldest woman there, with her long gray braids and her leathery, lined face and neck. "After our cocalero left us, there was so little food, so much sickness. So many of the children died, before they even learned to walk."

"You mean you didn't have a doctor before Dr. Baudouin?" Susan asked.

"We had a curandero," Ines said. "Don Yupanqui. He used to travel around all the nearby villages."

At Susan's baffled look, Paolo explained, "A healer. He knew a lot of local remedies and treatments. The villages are far apart, so traveling between them takes a lot of time. We only see people from

other villages once or twice a year."

"What did he think of Dr. Baudouin?"

"It's a funny thing," Ines said. "Don Yupanqui left a few weeks before Dr. Baudouin arrived, and we never saw him again. Dr. Baudouin came here to settle down and run his estancia, his cattle ranch. He had retired from medicine. But when we found out he was a doctor—well, little by little, we started going to him for help. And eventually he converted our old schoolhouse into the clinic. It was falling apart. His servants had to rebuild it from the ground up."

"What happened to Don Yupa—Yupak—"

"Don Yupanqui." Ines shrugged. "Who can say? He was always on the move. The forests are dangerous." She nodded toward Susan's bandaged leg. "He may have been lost to a camano attack. Or something else. He kept to himself, Don Yupanqui. Always traveled alone."

"You're lucky Dr. Baudouin showed up when he did. He sounds like a generous man."

"He is a holy man," Ines said reverently. The women crossed themselves.

Rosalind said, "That's what some say."

Sierra glared at Rosalind. "He is a very busy man."

"He is a very strange man," Rosalind retorted.

"Rosalind," Carlota hissed.

"Did you have mosquito netting for your mattress before the doctor arrived?" Sierra said. "Did you even have a mattress? He gives us clothing, and medicines, and he asks for almost nothing in return. He even gives us beef from his own herd, many times each year!"

Rosalind ignored her. "He never visits with us. Never even comes out when the sun is in the sky. And who here has ever been to his estancia? Not even Paolo, I'd bet."

All eyes turned to Paolo.

"I've been there," Paolo said uncomfortably. "It is very grand. He has many servants and a large herd of cattle. Very healthy." He managed a wan smile.

"How else is he strange?" Susan asked. Paolo realized that she had been guiding the conversation in this direction. The back of his neck began to sweat.

Rosalind crossed herself. "You have only to look at him," she said in a low voice. "He is not a normal man."

To Susan, Paolo said, "You must forgive Rosalind. Her son Mateo is sick, and she worries for him."

"The doctor is a great man. A saint," Ines said to Rosalind hotly.

Up above, a thick canopy of leaves and needles rustled and swayed, casting a muted green light on the flowers below.

"You think you have it hard now? Five of your children are alive. I bore eleven. Eleven babies. Do you know how many survived their first year? Two. That's what it was like after Don Arnulfo disappeared, before the doctor came. Eighteen horrible years. You were just a little girl when he came, you don't remember."

"Such dark talk," Paolo said, smiling, trying to ease the tension. He stood, motioned to the village women. "We have kept Susan awake long enough. She needs her rest."

Sierra was waiting up when Paolo got home, sitting at the table, hands folded in her lap. She looked chastened.

"How was the clinic today?" she asked as Paolo leaned his crutch on the wall next to the door.

He sat at the table; she got up and brought him a plate filled with fragrant fried potatoes, eggs, onions, peppers, tomatoes, rice, and chuño, then dipped each of them a cup of chicha, a fermented corn drink, from the big clay pot beside the table. He stirred the food around, wondering what was going on. "The clinic was fine," he said. "Mateo's cough is better. The gringita seems stable, and Susan was able to walk a little on her crutches."

Breathlessly, Sierra said, "Paolo—I—I'm sorry. About the other night. I get so crazy sometimes, when my heart burns for something."

Paolo started eating, wondering if she had poisoned his food, this contrition was unlike her. But it only tasted a little salty. He sipped his chicha. Mashed corn kernels swirled around his tongue.

"Ah, you don't believe me. I don't blame you." She sat close to him. "I know I can be headstrong. I think I forget sometimes how lucky I am to have married you, how well you provide for us. The other women, they're jealous that I have nicer clothes, that we always get the first cut from the doctor's cows. You never beat me, you're kind to the children. ... I don't know what I'd do without you." Her eyes glistened. She lowered her head, sipped her chicha.

His throat hurt. He drained his cup, she refilled it.

"I remember when we were children," she said. "How the other children mocked you. But I never did."

Of course you did, he thought. You were the worst, the loudest. How can you have forgotten? But he didn't want to break the spell of this moment.

"You were quiet, but you were so smart, even then! If the doctor's coming was a blessing for everyone, it was doubly a blessing for you. He let you exercise your mind, gave you the means to make something of yourself." She ran a finger along the rim of her cup. "Ah, Paolo. I remember when you first started courting me. My father was opposed, did you know? He thought our children would be crippled, like you. But I could see what the future would bring. I could see that when the doctor grew old, you could become the doctor in his place. I knew if my children ever had a chance of escaping this constricted life of ours, it was through education, reading, learning. Through you. And—" she lowered her head and blushed—"you were gentle. Respectful. Not full of boasts and bluster like some young bull."

He kept eating, though the food tasted like dust. These words—he had waited forever for words like these.

She sighed. "I've been unfair to you, I know it. I talked with Carlota today. I was complaining, like I always do. You know what she said to me? She said, 'Sierra, you selfish cow. You're the only woman here whose fingers aren't chapped and twisted with farm work. You're the luckiest woman in all of Santa Solangia, and you know it. Stop pestering your husband. You may not understand him, but he knows best. Can you believe that she spoke to me like that? I almost slapped her. But then I started thinking, and I realized she was right. You've always taken good care of us. I know you always will."

He sat back, watching her. He was accustomed to her fire, and he had seen her be tender with the children, but never before with him. Not like this.

"I have not been much of a wife," she said sadly.

"My dove, you are a loving mother," he said, his voice rough. He drank some more chicha. "If you're headstrong—well, I knew that when I married you. You have a fire inside you. And you're still the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

Her face softened. "More beautiful than the gringa?"

He chuckled. "The gringa is an ugly old boar."

They talked on through the evening, drinking chicha and laughing. When Paolo finally stood up to go to bed, he nearly toppled over. He hadn't realized how drunk he was. Sierra took his hand and led him to his mosquitero, then started undressing him.

"Sierra, no—" he said, batting at her with hands that felt very far

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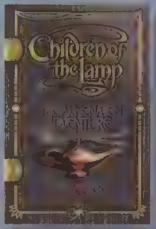

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She laughed and pushed him flat onto the low mattress. "Silly man! I'm only helping you. You're too drunk."

He let her wrestle with his pants, his shirt, till he finally lay naked on the bed, which seemed to tilt from side to side, like a boat on a lake.

She took off her dress and curled up beside him, skin to skin. "Paolo, I've been thinking," she said. "I've been unfair to you in more than one way."

The feel of her skin was intoxicating. He knew he should send her away, but he was so hungry for her touch.

"You don't want more children, I understand that. But a man has needs. I've been too angry to take care of those needs. But now—" she rolled onto her stomach, her breasts hanging heavy, a mischievous twinkle in her eye—"let me apologize."

It took a moment for him to realize her fingers were wrapped around his thickening member. "Wha—stop it! You know—"

"Shhh," she said. "Cara mia, trust me. There are ways to take care of a man's needs without risking a baby. Women know of these things."

He wanted to ask how, but his mind went hot and blank as she gripped him, stroked him.

"There, you like that?" she said teasingly. He looked down at her, a hazy vision of perfection.

And was shocked as, smiling, she bent her head toward his groin. Just the idea sent his blood soaring through his body. "It's wrong!"

"It's only a wife giving her husband pleasure," she said, her lips teasing his sensitive skin. He groaned, all thought lost.

He lay back, eyes closed, caught up in the dizzying sensations. He had never felt anything like this before. His body quickened, pushed with blinding speed toward climax.

Her mouth vanished for a moment, replaced by her hand. A new weight settled by his hips, shifting the bed beneath him. He felt her legs beside his.

Her legs.

He opened his eyes just in time to see her lower her groin toward his, a maddened look of triumph on her face.

Rage enveloped him. He seized her shoulders and threw her bodily off the mattress. She hit the dirt floor with a thud. "Bitch!" he screamed. His eyes burned. "How could you!"

She stood up, naked, rubbing her shoulder. "I should have waited till you passed out," she said coldly, and stalked out of the room.

WHEN PAOLO HOBBLED INTO THE CLINIC BEFORE dawn the next morning, Angie was dead.

She lay on the bed, covered with a white sheet, all the tubes disconnected from her arms.

"But—" Paolo said, staring stupidly at the doctor, who watched him from the doorway. His head ached and spun from last night's indulgence. "But she was getting better!"

"She took a turn for the worse," the doctor said. "There was nothing I could do."

Paolo's throat hurt. "Does her mother know?"

"Not yet. She's still asleep in the other room."

Stunned, Paolo sank into a chair beside the cot. He lifted the sheet near the little hand.

And saw the dark spot on the inside of her wrist. A small, fresh scab, in the middle of a pale bruise. Reaching up, he pulled the sheet down from her bloodless face. He raised his eyes to the doctor's in mute accusation.

The doctor smiled. "Think what you like," he said. "It doesn't trouble me."

Paolo licked his lips. "Did—did you—"

"Did I what?" The doctor's smile was cruel now.

"I thought you were trying to save her. You worked so hard."

"She was a lost cause," the doctor said.

"Because of the dengue?"

The doctor laughed. "My, hijo, how bold you've become. Such concern for a stranger's child." He went into his office and picked up his coat.

Following the doctor, Paolo said, "Why here? You never do it here."

Doctor Baudouin raised an eyebrow at him and sat down at his desk. "I remember once, early on, I found I missed fine chocolate. In Belgium, we had such chocolate as you could not imagine. So I found a chubby boy on the streets. For three days, I fed him nothing but candies. By the last day, he smelled like cocoa when he slept." With a fond smile, the doctor said, "After all that work, when I drained him, he had only the faintest taste of chocolate. But it was enough. A man like me—a man of cultured tastes—I grow tired of the same restricted diet. A new flavor can prove irresistible."

Paolo stared at him. He couldn't find words.

"I heard from Chicago again today," the doctor said. "They are most persistent. Imagine all the new flavors in Chicago. An intoxicating thought."

Perhaps it would be better, Paolo thought. His chest hurt. First Gustavo, now Angie—and here, in the clinic. Who knows what he will do next? "If you want to go," he said slowly, "to take a little vacation, perhaps I can manage the clinic here for you until you return."

The doctor's eyes burned. "If I leave," he said in a menacing hiss, "I will raze this building to the ground and salt the earth where it stood. I will destroy every bandage, every book, every drop of medicine. Siza will die in her mother's arms; Mateo will infect the whole village with tuberculosis. Your children will die. Is that what you want?"

Shocked, Paolo said, "Of course not! I only meant, if you wanted a break—"

"You disappoint me, Paolo. I thought you more loyal than to wish me gone."

"Doctor, please, of course I do not—"

"The younger generation of Santa Solangia—they do not understand the gifts I bring here. Perhaps I am no longer as welcome as I once was."

Hating himself, Paolo said, "We need you here! Everyone knows it. We would do anything for you!"

"So you say now, but what are you willing to do to back up those pretty words?"

Paolo swallowed and said, "Anything."

"Well, then," the doctor said. "You'll find a way to handle our gringa, won't you? Try to break the news to her gently." He gathered up his cane and left.

It could not have been more than a minute after the doctor left that a white-faced Susan crutched her way into the room beside Paolo.

"Susan," he said miserably, "I'm so sorry, but—" He saw from her expression that she already knew.

She sank onto the chair beside Angie's cot.

Paolo hastily replaced the sheet over the girl's arm and face. "We did all we could."

She raised shocked eyes to his. He had seen that look before. He had even seen it in the mirror. Deliberately, she pulled the sheet back down, stared at Angie's unmoving face.

"He is a fine doctor," Paolo said helplessly. "You must believe me, he did his best for her—"

She laid her fingertips on the cold forehead, brushed back a lock of hair. Touched the scab on the lifeless wrist.

"It was the dengue fever. She was just too ill, she had a relapse. At least she isn't suffering." Paolo's voice faded when he saw the thin trails of blood on Susan's arms, from where she had torn out the IV lines.

She levered herself up, leaning so hard on her crutches that her knuckles whitened. With difficulty, she said, "I heard you. Bastard. I heard it all," and hobbled out.

As the sun hung low on the horizon, a determined-looking Susan

crutched her way through the front room and out the door, ignoring Paolo's calls, the way she had refused to acknowledge his existence all day. Two hours later, she limped back into the clinic. With a contemptuous glance at Paolo, she collapsed into a chair in the waiting room, her face tight with pain.

"What are you doing?" he asked uneasily.

"What you don't have the huevos to do," she snapped. "Telling everyone the truth."

"Susan, it is pointless. Your daughter's passing was a tragedy, but the dengue—"

"You shut your mouth, you pig," she hissed. "Don't you dare talk about my Angie. You let it happen. You knew what he was, and you left him alone with her. Thank God the other people here have come to their senses."

Paolo's breath caught. "What do you mean?"

She nodded out the open front door. "See for yourself."

Salvador, Carlota, Agustin, Ines—most of the able-bodied men and half the women of Santa Solangia trudged toward the clinic, grimly silent. Some carried shovels or torches.

Paolo saw the looks on their faces and knew what was coming. He could hardly hear it, he was so tired already. "You have gone too far," he said. "You understand nothing."

"I understand that not everyone in Santa Solangia is the doctor's dog." She got up and hobbled outside.

Paolo, dreading what was to come, took up his own crutch and followed her.

"You see?" she said to him.

"Only too well," he said sadly. He met Salvador's eyes and felt a current of grief and guilt pass between them.

Salvador stepped up and yanked Susan's crutches from her hands.

"What —" Susan yelped, her arms windmilling for balance. She hopped on one foot.

"It cannot be permitted," Salvador explained. "You cannot interfere here."

"But—but he's a monster!" Susan said, shocked out of her anger.

Ines said, "He is a man of God! Have you forgotten that he saved your life? You are the monster, trying to take away our only hope!" She shoved Susan, who toppled backward with a cry. A bright red blotch appeared on the bandages around her leg.

"She was my only child." Susan shouted, then started sobbing.

The pain in Paolo's chest was so hard, so absolute, he wondered if his heart had stopped beating altogether. He was tired, so tired. But he could not rest, not yet. His village needed him.

"She's the monster!" came one strained voice. Another. "The gringa is the real monster." The villagers moved closer, raising shovels, fists, torches.

Paolo took a deep breath, squared his shoulders. "Stop it! Leave her alone!" He used his crutch to push through the people surrounding Susan, who sat on the ground. The villagers shrank back from him. "What are you going to do, tear her limbs from her body? Murder her right here? We are Bolivians, not animals! Violence has never been our way. In the heat of this moment, killing may seem like a solution—but don't you see that it would poison you? I cannot let you damn yourselves!"

"But—we have to do something!" Salvador said. "She cannot be allowed to destroy what we need."

"She is a grieving mother," Paolo said. "Show some compassion." He reached down and pulled Susan to her feet, held his hand out for her crutches. Salvador reluctantly handed them over. "Come," he said to Susan. "Come inside. I will take care of you."

Turning his back on the silent crowd, he hobbled back inside the clinic, Susan in tow. He stood in the doorway, glaring out, using his eyes to dare anyone to come in after him. When no one moved, he slammed the door.

He led Susan to her hospital room, helped her lie back.

"I don't understand," Susan whispered. "He's sick, he's evil, why don't they—"

"Shh," Paolo said. "I'll take care of everything. Don't worry."

He went to the medicine cabinet. To his surprise, a small bottle stood right in front, a syringe beside it. He read the label on the bottle. Pentobarbitone sodium. The dosage instructions were simple. Staring at the needle, Paolo wondered who needed the medicine more. Susan or him.

Paolo seated himself at Susan's side, automatically swabbing the inside of her elbow, as Dr. Baudouin had taught him years ago. He was distantly surprised that his hands still obeyed him, they seemed so far away.

"What's this?" she asked, pulling back in alarm, but he kept a firm grip on her arm.

"Something for the pain." He slid the needle into her arm.

Within a minute, her body loosened, and her breath stilled. Paolo thumbed her eyes closed and drew the sheet up over her face.

Paolo didn't know how long he sat there before the door swung open. Belatedly, he realized he had registered the familiar thud of the doctor's cane in the hall a few moments before. He blinked hard, tears spilled down his cheeks. He wiped them away with his sleeve.

The door opened. "Well, well," came the doctor's voice.

Paolo could not speak, could not even look up at that cold, dark face. He kept his eyes fixed on his hands, twisting the corner of the sheet that covered the gringa's body.

The doctor said, "Perhaps Chicago can wait."

The streets were empty when Paolo slowly hobbled the familiar route home. He felt like his whole body was made of soft cotton, numb, yielding, inanimate. That he moved at all was a wonder to him.

He could feel the eyes on him, from inside the darkened doorways. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered.

Inside, Sierra sat at the table, her hair bound up with a tall Spanish tortoiseshell comb. The children's faces peered from the dim doorway to their bedroom. Little Rosa reached her chubby arms up to him.

"Go to bed," he said to them. "Now."

Sierra stood. She wore his favorite green dress, covered with a cream-colored shawl. "Paolo," she said uncertainly.

He dropped his crutch on the floor and limped to her, reached up

He could feel the eyes on him, from inside the darkened doorways. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered.

to pull the comb from her dark hair. Circled his arms around her, pulled her to him, pressed his face to the soft skin of her neck. Drank in her fragrance, waiting to feel something, anything.

He pulled her to his mosquitero, threw back the netting, toppled her onto the bed with him. Lifted up her skirts.

"Paolo, wait, let me get out of this dress."

He yanked down his trousers, wrenching one of his fingers in the cloth. The pain seemed distant, inconsequential.

His hands found her breasts. His body cried out in relief when he buried himself in her.

This was all that mattered, this body pleasure, this moment of sensation—but even this could not drown out the roaring silence in his cold, dead heart. ❧

Peas and Carrots

Sometimes it really takes a leap of faith to break out of the roles that life has assigned you.

By Michael Canfield

Illustration by Peter Ferguson

Sophie. The script called her Sophie, and Sam the optimist, Sam traveler without cares, loved her since creation. Azure-eyed Sophie, orphaned country maid, as new in Vienna as the century was young, Sophie in chiffon frock of cobalt blue, her brown hair unadorned with silk ribbon, tied in plain linen.

Tonight, upon hearing him say, Pardon me, Fraulein, do you believe in fate? brown-haired, azure-eyed Sophie would surely fall into his arms, her cheek upon his breast. His body, breath, and kisses would let her know that fears could no longer trouble love. For this alone had he been written: to rescue Sophie from Maximilian, and sweep her away forever. The invisible hand had scripted it and tonight he'd win her, though she did not even know his name.

The script actually named Sam "Handsome Stranger with Newspaper at Next Table." Sam didn't know, nor think it important, if anyone found him handsome. Still, he needed to call himself something, so he called himself Sam. Plain old Sam, and decided he ought to be from somewhere doing something so he became a Chicagoan wandering the capitals of Europe. He chose the name and place before the first evening, while tumbling in dreams of fabric and light: white and gold, cobalt blue and azure.

The velvet curtain rose, applause broke the fourth wall and the mist, from the audience in the house invisible. Sam pushed a hand, though his thick forelock, then brushed his worn but serviceable suit jacket. He drank cool air from a empty eggshell cup, then replaced it on its mark. He drummed fingers on yesterday's *Herald Tribune*, then brought its double-fold to the iron table's rim. He scuffled the sole of one loafer quietly over the warped boards. Footlights and spots imbued the darkness with midday sunbeams. He crossed his legs, refolded the newspaper, as again life began, the stage set for Vienna.

A happy half dozen Viennese filled the outdoor café, sipping from eggshell cups, moving their lips, living the background of a June morning in 1901, in the city on the Danube.

A mustachioed waiter stood immobile. The mustache looked a real soup-strainer, and the waiter wore it with marked pride.

On cue, the waiter marched, making circles around the tables and serving. With an arm raised to balance a silver tray of cups and saucers, his red vest strained against gold buttons and barely contained his girth, exposing the white shirt underneath.

The waiter approached Sam's table. "Peas and carrots?" he asked, and twirled the end of his mustache.

"Peas and carrots," replied Sam. The scene required him, as well as the waiter and the various Viennese, to move their lips, simulating small talk. "Peas and carrots" were lip-moving words, mouthed to be unheard in the house invisible. The waiter took Sam's cup, lifting it to the tray with flourish, then spun away to serve another.

Upstage, a girl engaged a court of three devoted boys crowding one tiny table. The girl giggled through a story and the smitten boys clung to every syllable. "Peas and carrots. Peas and carrots!" she said. In another corner, a small, old couple looked into each other's eyes as if for the first time, aquiline noses almost touching, whispering soft peas and carrots to one another.

Sam turned over the newspaper, then folded it another way. He scanned the columns of solid black bars, thinking of his big moment. He'd speak to Sophie at the right time; not only with voice, but with eyes and his blood's longing.

Near Sam, a spot opened, bathing the unoccupied table center stage in light.

Brown-haired, azure-eyed Sophie entered left and crossed right. She gripped a small cloth handbag in white-knuckled hands. Eyes darting, she stepped farther left, then right, searching the imaginary street.

Sophie rested on a chair's edge at the table under the spot. She held the handbag in her lap and kept looking each way, over one shoulder, then the other.

Sam turned the newspaper again, playing his part. He would have something to say soon. Beloved Sophie.

Maximilian entered, wearing white spats on shoes polished to a dazzle. He wore a felt hat cocked over his ear, and rested one hand in a coat pocket. His black eyes found Sophie while her search led her to look the other way. He reslanted his hat, dusted his lapels, then took a seat at the table.

Sophie turned. Seeing her lover and benefactor Maximilian suddenly there, she jumped, gripping the handbag tighter.

"Am I behind my time, button?" said Maximilian with a lopsided smile. "What's time to us, anyhow? We're free and in love, and in Vienna."

She shook her head. "You gave me a start, is all."

"Such a start that you cannot give me a kiss?"

"Nonsense," she said.

He leaned, presenting a cheek, which she pecked.

"I would not have kept you waiting, I had to set a fellow straight in the street!" Maximilian's head rocked with a hat's fidget, even as he boomed words with a coward's bravado.

"I think I shall leave you," she said suddenly, trembling.

Maximilian made a frown, eyes still smiling. "You still haven't forgiven me then, button. You will never leave me. We're bound together. It's destiny. Don't fight it."

"You've hurt me."

"Without intent. I am only a man. Have you the book?"

Sophie hesitated before unsnapping the handbag. She finally reached in, removing a small notebook, bound in moleskin. "These are the words of my heart," she told him. "I've shown them to no one ever. I once believed I could show them to some man. A true and faithful man."

Maximilian extended a hand, palm upturned. "Let's see."

"Are you a faithful man?"

The waiter spun to their table. Maximilian dismissed him, swiping air with a hand. Maximilian leaned toward Sophie.

"I have not been perfect. I have not claimed to be anything but flesh and blood. May not a man of mere flesh and blood see your untouched book?"

He reached and Sophie pulled the notebook to her bosom.

Sam, at his table, listening, clutched his newspaper tighter. Not yet, he told himself. Be patient, be magnificent, bold, and prevail.

Maximilian slumped back, as if punched. "I see, then. You don't love me. I expected as much."

"Must you be cruel?" begged Sophie.

"If You are the cruel one. My affection means so little to you, you will not even show me your occasional scribblings. Put the thing away, then." He snapped his fingers to summon the waiter. He took a few coins and tossed them on the table. "I leave you to your romantic fantasies. And your chastity." He stood, turned heel, then stormed away.

Sophie leaped up, called after him, drawing the attention of other tables.

"Peasandcarrots," murmured the girl and three boys. "Peasandcarrots," whispered the small, old couple to each other.

Sophie dropped the book, which slipped under Sam's chair, and she spilled the handbag. She knelt to retrieve her things, crying, "Wait Maximilian! Forgive me!"

Now, thought Sam, discarding the newspaper. He fell to one knee, retrieving the treasured notebook.

Sophie reached in the same beat, so that they touched it together. He met her dewed eyes, as he had met them many times in the dream mist between existences.

"Pardon me, Fraulein. Do you believe in fate?" He caught her with words and eyes; Sophie his alone for one moment.

Maximilian, who had not left, but waited expectantly for Sophie to come running after him, now spoke to her from near stage left. "Come now, button," and he held his arm out, crooked.

Sam and Sophie still gripped the notebook between them. Sam pleaded with his eyes—don't go! Come away with me.

She pulled to notebook from him. "Thank you, Mein Herr."

The blood rushed from his face in shame at the cloying, clichéd inflection he'd given the line.

She crossed to Maximilian, taking his arm with hesitation. She always crossed to Maximilian, no matter what.

"There, button," said Maximilian. "Am I so frightening?"

Light diffused in Sam's tears. Sophie, head bowed, allowed Maximilian to lead her off right. The unhappy half dozen Viennese left their background tables to their own exits. Sam again took his seat. He refolded the newspaper and scanned the black print bars. Taking the beat, he looked toward Sophie's exit, then to a vacant chair, then back again. The waiter passed through the empty café, silver tray pinned under an arm.

Darkness enveloped the stage, and the waiter stopped on his final mark to stand immobile. In the mist beyond the fourth wall, in the house invisible, applause shattered thinly.

Silence followed, the velvet curtain descended. Time ceased and Sam slept again, dreaming fabric and light, gold and white, vermilion and azure.

Sam awoke, feeling an invisible hand close his throat, an invisible foot press his chest. In the absences between performances, while he dreamed of Sophie, a change had come. The script rewrote, or unwrote, at will, with no concern for characters. Now the script had cut his line.

No matter. He would speak to Sophie with eyes and body, he still had those. He didn't need words.

The velvet curtain rose; through the mist, from the house invisible, applause broke the fourth wall.

Sam pushed a hand through his thick forelock. He sipped air and dust, then replaced the coffee cup on its mark. He drummed fingers over the newspaper, then brought it to the table's edge. Viennese filled the café. The mustachioed waiter spun through the tables.

"Peas and carrots," said he when coming to Sam's table.

"Peas and carrots," Sam stammered, thinking, I must be ready. My eyes will speak for me now. I don't need lines.

The waiter took the cup. Brown-haired, azure-eyed Sophie entered, looked furtively around, sat on a chair's edge. Soon, Maximilian sauntered in.

"Am I behind my time, button?"

In time she produced the moleskin notebook, saying, "These are the words of my heart."

They argued over it. Sophie begged Maximilian not to be cruel Maximilian snapped for the waiter, threw a few coins on the table, stormed off

Sophie leaped up, called him, drawing attention.

"Peasandcarrots," murmured the girl and three boys "Peasandcarrots," whispered the small, old couple to each other

Sophie dropped the notebook, which slipped under Sam's chair, and she spilled the handbag. She knelt to retrieve her things, crying, "Wait Maximilian. Forgive me!"

Sam tossed away the newspaper and fell to one knee, retrieving the treasured notebook

Sophie found it in the same beat Sam met her dewed eyes. He took a breath where he would have once had words to speak. Pardon me, Fraulein Do you believe in fate?

They held the notebook between them. He pleaded with his eyes Don't go. Come with me. My eyes tell you I'm true

Stay.

She took the notebook back "Thank you, Mein Herr."

Again. The blood rushed from his face He understood It isn't the line, it's me I'm meant to fail.

The lights diffused. Sophie, head bowed, let Maximilian lead her off to her end. The unhappy half-dozen Viennese found their separate exits. Sam took his seat. He ignored the newspaper, and forgot, until too late, to follow Sophie's exit, then took to a vacant chair The waiter passed through the empty café to his mark, tray pinned under an arm

Darkness took the stage, and the waiter stood immobile From the house invisible, applause trickled through the fourth wall

The velvet curtain descended Time ceased and Sam slept, dreaming rope and cloth and heat gold and white, vermilion, azure, and the indifference of the script

The velvet curtain rose in silence before the mist shrouded house invisible Sam pushed a hand through his thick forelock He lifted the coffee cup and replaced it on its mark, then fingered the newspaper Viennese filled the tables and the mustachioed waiter spun through the café, coming to Sam

"Peas and carrots?" He waited for Sam s reply

Sam held his tongue

Perturbed, yet undaunted, the waiter reached for the cup.

A delicate nudge with the newspaper, and Sam moved the cup off its mark The waiter's hand grasped at empty air in the place the cup should have been. His jaw hardened

You can't see, can you, poor fool? We don't matter. Sam tried to say The words came out "Peas and carrots "

The waiter glared cross-eyed, turning purple. "Peas!" he hissed. He made a second pass, and Sam pushed the cup farther

The waiter stamped a foot. Sam poked his tongue at the man and winked

The waiter circled to the other side of the table At his third try for the cup, Sam seized it, dropping it into the newspaper, which he promptly rolled up Then he clamped the newspaper to his chest, folding his arms across it.

"Peas! And! Carrots!" said the waiter in disgust. He stiffened Marching back around, he bent formally, then pantomimed lifting a cup He lowered the nonexistent cup to the tray with special flourish

Gratified, he twisted a mustache corner. "Peas and carrots!" Tray aloft, he twirled away

Brown-haired, azure-eyed Sophie entered, furtive, sat at a chair's edge Maximilian sauntered in

"Am I behind my time, button?"

They spoke their lines She showed the moleskin notebook "These are the words of my heart "

He demanded it, she demurred to his disdain, she begged him not to be cruel Maximilian snapped for the waiter, threw a few coins on the table, stormed off

Darkness took the stage, and the waiter stood immobile. From the invisible, applause trickled through the fourth wall.

Sophie jumped up "Wait Maximilian! Forgive me!" "Peasandcarrots," murmured the people in the background. Sophie dropped the book and the handbag, spilling the latter's contents She knelt to retrieve them

Sam let fall the rolled newspaper The hidden cup shattered He dropped to a knee, retrieving her notebook

Sophie reached out in the same beat and together they touched it. He met her dewed eyes

Maximilian called and she thanked Sam, intending he release the notebook as usual.

He didn't release it. He held it fast. Sophie gave a start. She tugged at the book, panic in her eyes

"Peas and carrots," he said. Don't go. Sophie wrenched and twisted the notebook. He let go

She stumbled, but rose on cue. Inching away, hand to mouth, stunned, she didn t notice she d crossed to Maximilian until she trod his spats

"There, button " said Maximilian, "Am I so frightening?"

She took his arm, as always, he led her away

Sam sank into the chair The paper had unrolled between his feet the cup had broken in shards

The waiter took a final turn through the café, stopping at Sam's table With extravagant movement, he bent down, gathering the cup shards onto the silver tray. When he had them all, he righted himself, becoming immobile on his mark when darkness took the stage and the curtain fell Sam lay his head in weary arms

Fabric and light, gold and white Azure

The velvet curtain rose, a few sprinkled coughs and then silence followed from the mist. Sam pushed a hand through his thick forelock for the last time. For during the hours between existences a decision had come, greater than the script. Beyond tonight, no more performances

Sam slumped in his chair, everything lost at last His hand weighed upon the newspaper The lights rose

The waiter made turns between the tables, twirling the end of his mustache

"Peas and carrots," he said to Sam in a tone warning there'd be no nonsense with displaced coffee cups this night! He did not wait for Sam to mumble his final peas and carrots, but seized the replacement cup, clanking it smartly down on the tray. He twirled off. Sam gnmaced to himself, thinking he might even miss the fellow

The others, at the other tables, in the background, murmured, "Peas and carrots "

Brown-haired, azure-eyed Sophie entered in her frock, searched furtively, finally sat, handbag in both hands No matter how faint, until tonight, he had still had hope

No longer, Sam thought Never again, to see her face, to hear her voice, to breathe the same air as she

Maximilian entered."Am I behind my time, button?"

One always thinks there'll be time enough

"I think I shall leave you," Sophie said in her turn.

"You never will," Maximilian said rightly

Maximilian demanded the moleskin notebook Sophie refused. He threw a few coins on the table and stood "I leave you to your roman-

tic fantasies. And your chastity." He turned heel

Don't follow, Sam pleaded, twisting the newspaper. Don't

Sophie jumped up, spilling the handbag's contents. The moleskin notebook fell to the boards. She kneeled to gather her things. Sam dropped to a knee.

Sophie reached out in the same beat and together they touched the notebook. She avoided his eyes. His heart pounded. His heart. He tore the notebook from her hands.

Sophie fell back, dumbfounded. She reached for it, and he shoved it under his jacket.

"Mein Herr, I beg you ... "

He shook his head rapidly, and flushed. Viennese stirred from their background tables, whispering, "Peasandcarrots?"

Sam fumbled and bit his lip, tasting copper. "S ... Sophie ..." he said.

Sophie's eyes grew large as a trapped doe's.

The Viennese gawked and gasped. Maximilian waited for Sophie to take his arm, blinking in confusion. The waiter rushed in, tray tucked under an arm, and stood center stage, glowering.

"I must speak," said Sam, expecting to be crushed. Expecting not knowing what to expect.

No hand gripped his throat. The lights didn't fail, and the curtain didn't fall.

Sophie waited. "Then speak."

He scarcely knew how to start, and feared he might revert to stammering out peas and carrots.

He tried to swallow, dry throat cracking. "Fraulein, I'm a small character, you've no reason to listen to me, but I've watched you night after night. Don't go away with him, into misery, because the script says. He won't make you happy."

She smiled slightly. "Am I meant to be happy, then?"

"Yes!" He took the moleskin notebook from his coat, holding it forth. "You have this! This is your happiness! Keep it, don't give it to him, or to anyone. Keep it. That's all I want to tell you; and that I love you. You should be free."

She held out a hand. "You have my property, Mein Herr."

He hesitated. Maybe she'd take it and run to Maximilian, keeping as best she could to the mangled plot. The notebook did belong to her, to do with as she wanted. "Reconsider," he asked; but she said nothing, and so he gave it back.

Sophie opened it to the middle, then turned it around for Sam to see. Blank.

She turned a leaf. Blank. Another, also blank. She turned leaf after leaf for him. All blank.

"See, Mein Herr? There's nothing here. Only here ..." She gestured about the stage. "I have only my lines to mouth, my marks to hit. It's a surface with nothing beneath. I must go with Maximilian. I will go with Maximilian. It's in the script."

She closed the book.

Sam lowered his head. She held a hand against his cheek, cool, against his overheated skin.

"Don't think you've failed. You played a small part in a silly melodrama well. Handsome Stranger with Newspaper at Next Table. I'm written to see you once, wonder what might have been, and never forget you."

Maximilian stood frozen, black eyes small and fixed. His chin trembled. He couldn't move, he didn't know how to behave without the script. None of them did.

"I'm going with him now, Handsome Stranger. As scripted."

"Sam," he whispered. "My name is Sam."

"No, Mein Herr. You're mistaken."

"Call me Sam."

"I cannot. You haven't a name."

"Indulge me; what harm will it do?"

"No harm. No good either. The play is over."

"Call me Sam."

She laughed at him, but kindly.

"You know you don't have to follow the script, but it scares you," said Sam. "I want to tell you that's all right."

The smiled faded. "Without the script ... What'll happen?"

"Something will happen. Something unimagined."

She looked at the notebook. "Something unwritten. To fill your notebook with. Listen! We're speaking our own words, not lines in a script. I'm not supposed to have a name, but I do. I'm Sam. I come from Chicago. I'm—"

"Sam," she said. "From Chicago."

"Peasandcarrots!" shouted the waiter.

The Viennese erupted. "Peasandcarrots! Peasandcarrots!" they cried, flinging their hands in the air. Nothing could save the scene now. Chairs were knocked over, tables upturned. The waiter rushed about gathering cup shards, righting upended tables to no avail.

Maximilian projected, desperately trying to be heard over the din. "There, button. Am I so frightening?" Arm still extended, he cocked his head toward an imaginary, invisible Sophie of his own illusion and exited.

The terrified peasandcarrots-ing Viennese ran off, disappearing into the wings before anything could be done. The waiter, face purple, kept spinning through the wreckage. He glared at Sam as he turned.

"Have something to say to me?" said Sam.

"Peas and carrots!" shouted the waiter, and kept spinning.

Sophie and Sam let him go on, and stood toe to toe together. They clasped hands over the moleskin notebook and looked into each other's eyes.

"What next?" she asked.

"I kiss you, I think."

He embraced her and they did kiss, pressing their whole lengths together. From the mist, in the house invisible, beyond the fourth wall, came some applause. Not much, very little in fact, but what of it? They were no longer a play. Only two people.

"Aren't you frightened?"

"Terrified," said Sam. "Come on."

He led her to the the proscenium, to the precipice of the house invisible and the now silent mist.

"We can't go there!"

"Who says we can't? Him?" Sam pointed to the spinning waiter. "And we can't stay here." He took a breath. "Ready?"

"No!" she laughed. "Heavens no! Who are we anyway? Did a handsome man and a country maid ever do such things?"

"That's not who we are. We're Sophie and Sam. We're ... Hell, who knows!"

Still hand in hand, they took a long stride over the footlights, toward the house invisible. Sam steeled himself to jump. Just before his feet left the boards, he thought he might turn chicken and jump back for the safe stage; but Sophie didn't, so he didn't. He'd gotten her into this, he had to be at least as brave as she.

As one, Sophie and Sam leaped into the mist.

The waiter kept spinning. He spun alone on the stage through upended tables that no longer evoked a particular spring day in the city on the Danube in 1901, but that were just a rough pile of gypsum wood props again.

When he could spin no longer, he fell exhausted to one knee, holding his tray perpendicular to the floor, as a crutch. He stayed immobile, panting, watching the infinite, the mist-shrouded house invisible, where the errant pair had run to. When he regained his wind, he climbed to his feet, straightened his jacket, and crept near the proscenium.

He peered over, but saw little to interest him—though he thought he imagined children playing somewhere. It might have been that, but it might just as well have been rats scurrying in the aisles, or wind knocking around in the flyspaces. He looked left and right, then held the tin silver-plated tray out over the edge. Nothing happened to it, so twisting his torso, he flung the prop toward the invisible with all his might.

The tray, spinning like a new planet around its own center, disappeared in the enveloping mist. The waiter cupped an ear, expecting to discover a doomed clang as the tray succumbed to gravity. He waited a long time but heard nothing, nothing at all. ❧

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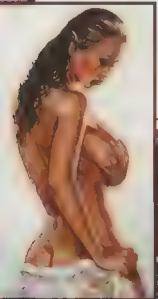

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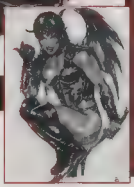

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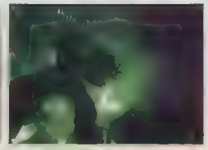
By Eric T. Baker

Fable brings a new level of RPG realism to your video screen.

TOP Fable *looks to up the ante in the world of video-RPG's, with beautiful graphics, and a storyline where your actions determine the outcome* BOTTOM Eberron *makes waves as a "renaissance* D&D*"*



Fable for the Xbox from Peter Molyneux (*Black and White, Dungeon Keeper,* and, for the old school, *Populous*) and Microsoft is a new role-playing game with real-time combat designed to let players create roles. While still a long way from the complete freedom of paper and dice role-playing, *Fable* does allow players to make significant moral judgments about how their characters will behave while pursuing the game's story and, more interestingly, when they aren't.

The game begins with the character as a young boy, but that only lasts for the length of an introductory, four-stop quest. Then the game fast-forwards to the hero's teenage years for some training and short quests. That done, the game then jumps to the character's adulthood and the real business of the game. The underlying game play is very close to that of all other console games in a fantasy setting: the hero employs melee, ranged attacks and magic skills during various battles that occur while he is chasing about the maps after people and items. The most complicated part of the game is increasing the hero's levels as he earns experience, but players will get the hang of that quickly.

Aside from traveling and fighting and triggering cut scenes, the real play of *Fable* is the decision making and the almost *Sims*-like life the hero can have outside the story. An example of the former is right at the start: the hero finds a man about to commit adultery. The man offers him money not to tell his wife. The evil option is to take the money, but, having taken it, the hero can go tell the wife anyway and get credit for the good deed, even though he's broken his word to the husband.

An example of the hero's life beyond the story is his getting married. Flirting can lead to marriage, but it is most effective if the hero puts on nice clothes and gets a good haircut and some pretty tattoos. Once married, the hero has to install his wife in a house and visit her regularly if he wants her to stay happy, very regularly if he wants her to be in the mood for knookie. Bigamy is allowed (and is not considered good or evil) as long as each wife is in a house in a different village. While there is nothing wrong with *Fable*'s actual plot line, the true strength of it is as a massive "sandbox" in which to play out all the many ways the hero can change himself and the world.

Settlers of Catan is a classic German board game whose English edition is distributed by Mayfair Games distributes in America. Now Microsoft has released a computerized version of the game that contains both a single-player and an online multiplayer mode through Microsoft's Zone

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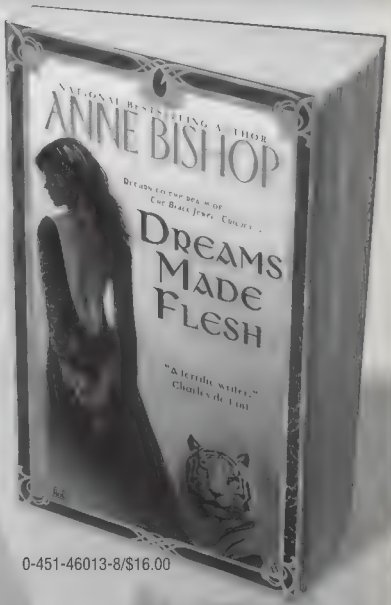

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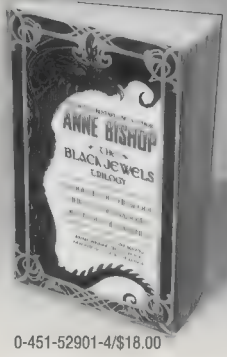

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ABOVE Catan *requires strategy, and promises interesting online play for up to 4 players. BELOW LEFT* Star Wars Battlefront *provides exciting action that can be had both online and off BELOW RIGHT Medieval samurai action is served up in* Blood Will Tell.

service. The stand-alone game is sold at a one-time price, but players need a subscription to the Zone to play it online against as many as three other players.

Simple to learn and hard to master, *SoC* places the players on a new continent, depicted in hexes of different terrain types, that they explore and then exploit, competing with the other players (real or computer) to earn 10 victory points. Much of the appeal of the original game involved trading between players, and the computer version has a simple, fast interface to allow players to trade. The computer players are programmed to trade as well. In the online version, a computer AI takes over for any player who suddenly drops from the game.

At about an hour a game, *SoC* is longer than a *Counter Strike* mission, but not the lifestyle commitment of a MMORPG. It is a time proven, family friendly game that is perfect for online play and is fun even against the computer.

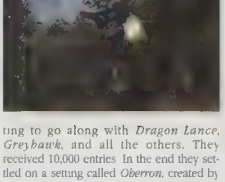
There have been many *Star Wars* games over the years that have put the player alone into the universe of the movies. There is also *Star Wars Galaxies*, a massive, multiplayer online RPG that puts players in the universe among hundreds of other fans. ***Star Wars Battlefront*** new on PC, Xbox and PS2, provides a multi-player experience without a monthly fee. Granted that experience is limited to fighting and killing, but both of those things are a lot of fun when done in *SW* clothing.

The game comes with a single player mode and the multiplayer online mode. The single player mode has a campaign that lets the player refight the classic battles of the six films. In every other important respect, the single- and multiplayer modes provide the same options. Players choose an era, a faction, and a character type. Factions are not available out of their time period, so the Rebels of the later films are never pitted against the Robot Army of the early films, or against the Republic forces, for that matter.

Each faction has a standard blaster and grenades carrying grunt, a heavy weapons class, a scout class, and a pilot class. Each faction also has special soldier class such as the Rebel's Wookies and the Robot Army's Droidekas. There are 18 different maps spread over 10 planets. Some are oriented toward vehicles and others toward foot soldiers, but there are plenty of vehicles on all of them, and the chance to pilot an X-Wing or an AT-AT in battle maybe the best part of the game.

The game play of *SW.B* adds nothing to the template of this game genre created by *Battlefield 1942*, but that is only going to bother players who have already been playing *BF1942* or one of its successors. For players new to this genre and those players who buy it to play on their consoles, *SW.B* is a robust, entertaining battle experience with the great icing of being set in the *SW* universe.

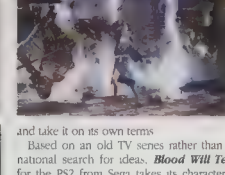
In 2002, Wizards of the Coast held a contest to pick their next big background for *Dungeons & Dragons* supplements, a setting to go along with *Dragon Lance*, *Greyhawk*, and all the others. They received 10,000 entries. In the end they settled on a setting called *Oberron*, created by Keith Baker (no relation). That setting is now in print, the first book being a 320-page, full color, hardcover edition that gives all the core background, races, classes, and magic of the world.



The biggest difference in ***Eberron*** is the introduction of action points. A staple in games as different as *Top Secret* (another old school reference) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, players are given these points each time they level and they may spend them to activate certain feats or to directly influence die rolls. This mechanic is the foundation of *Eberron*'s claim to being a "cinematic" *D&D* setting (the introduction lists nine movies to watch for inspiration, but no books or comics to read). As in the other settings where they are used, the dice serve to make the characters more effective in the wide open, competent at everything when the chips are down the way movie characters are.

Worldwise, the biggest differences are the lack of gods and the lack of alignment. Religion is a matter of faith, and all beings are gray, although some are lighter gray than others. The word "noir" has been used to describe the tone of *Oberron* and certainly distant gods and no one to kill on sight simply because they are known to be "evil" fits the noir mold, but it is going to take a special Game Master to sell his players on the sort of grim, cynical plots that go with the noir label.

With its magic trains, floating castles, merchant houses, and mercenaries of living metal, *Eberron* is a world perhaps best introduced as "Renaissance *D&D*," with magic instead of science, until players have a chance to explore the setting more fully.



and take it on its own terms.

Based on an old TV series rather than a national search for ideas, ***Blood Will Tell*** for the PS2 from Sega takes its characters, setting, and story from *Dororo*, an anime by Osamu Tezuka. Players take the role of Hyakkimaru, a medieval samurai. What makes him special is that fiends have stolen 48 of his body parts. The story of the game, and the purpose of the 60 boss battles it leads the player through, is to find and reclaim Hyakkimaru's body parts. This quest is played out over seven long but interesting chapters and, for most of the game, with the help of a young thief character named Dororo.

Lacking his real body parts at the start of the game, Hyakkimaru's body is made up of many man-made parts. For instance, both his forearms come off to reveal swords, and there is a cannon mounted in his left knee. As the character progresses through the game and gains more of his own body parts, he not only keeps his swords and cannon, but also gains more abilities and improved stats. Some of these improvements are dramatic and striking, such as early on when Hyakkimaru regains one of his eyes and the player can suddenly see the game in color for the first time.

Besides body parts, Hyakkimaru also picks up new swords fairly often, and these

grant him even more abilities and powers. It is difficult to get bored with *BWT* because the main character is constantly changing, always getting a new way to battle the bosses/fiends. Players who can keep up with the changes and who can hit the buttons for the combinations more accurately and quickly will actually be in more danger getting through the environment while shackled by the game's bad camera work than they will be from any of the bosses, particularly since the game's camera functions well in these battles. With its compelling story and ever-evolving combat, *BWT* is definitely worth a look from action game fans.

There are two really good pieces of news

Solid action, a vibrant cast of characters, and a complex plotline make Gungrave: Overdrive *a welcome addition to any gamer's library.*

about Mastif's ***Gungrave: Overdrive*** for the PS2. One is that the game retails for only $15. The other is that there is a rapid-fire mode that can be set so that the characters will keep shooting as long as the player holds the trigger down. Players can press the button every time they shoot if they prefer, but with all the lead that is pumped out over the course of this game, turning on the rapid-fire will save much repetitive stress.

There are three playable characters in *G:O: Beyond the Grave*, who have pistols with endless ammo plus a combination club, shield, cannon, and coffin chained to him; Juji Kabane, a blind swordsman; and Rocketbilly Redcadillac, who fights with a guitar. These three are out to destroy the empire of a sadistic drug lord, and along the way they destroy just about everything else too. Not only are there tons of enemies to dispatch, but most objects in the levels are destructible, and since each hit charges the character's combo meter, everything that can go, should. A full combo meter lets the characters perform demolition shots, which are even more frightening than the character's other attacks.

Despite it's low price, *G:O* doesn't feel like a cheap game. Its graphics, game play, and particularly its long, convoluted story are on par with other action games costing three times as much. It's not an innovative game, but it is a solid one. It is a good value that will keep most players involved right through to the end. ❧

duirwaigh gallery

Continued from page 61

AB: And how do you see Duirwaigh's role in facilitating these kinds of experiences for others?

AS: Duirwaigh means "doorway." Duir, in Gaelic, is the name for Oak, which in Celtic mythology is always the ancient tree, the time- and record-keeper of the forest. These powerful trees were known to draw magical forces unto themselves, and in fact were how the Druids were named, for Druis is the word for magical knowledge, which is imbued by the oak tree. The English word "door" took its roots from duir, as doors were often made of oak. So Duirwaigh becomes, literally, a doorway cut through the oak, into the realms of magical knowledge and experience.

The works within Duirwaigh are relics from that enchanted place, beyond the door. People who encounter the works of the artists we represent often have that moment of awe—that sudden intake of breath that leaves them shuddering with inspiration. Duirwaigh was created for that very purpose. Interaction with the art invites the viewers' participation, calling them to rekindle a sense of wonder they once knew. Duirwaigh exists expressly to be that threshold for people into the realms of enchantment they may have forgotten. They step through the doorway into a realm half remembered, half dreamed, wholly adored.

AB: Although all your artists are very different stylistically (varying media, technique, scale, etc.), they all seem to complement each other. Do you perceive a common thread in their individual visions?

AS: Certainly there are some thematic similarities, as many artists within Duirwaigh build their works out of legend and fairytale and are driven by the desire to explore symbolic images and tradition-filled narratives. But whereas one artist might be drawn by myth and another by high fantasy, their works are individually atmospheric and deeply sincere. They create bowers that feel like home to me, that give me the sense that they are working from very personal and truthful spaces artistically. I am always delighted to be invited into their vision, and it is my pleasure to invite others across the threshold, through the Duirwaigh, to experience those realms for themselves.

Additionally, each of them is willing to excavate and explore their own inner worlds to bring back something of the sacred. They are also willing to use awe and wonder in tandem with their artistic gifts. One of the most impressive and inspirational common threads I perceive in this group of artists is their integrity. In a social and financial environment that often rewards for compromise, each of these artists remains highly devoted and truthful to their vision. As artists, they are the empaths, the soul teachers, and the mystic healers of our society. For this, they have my deepest sense of respect and my most profound support.

AB: Although you have already accomplished a great deal, visions are never really finished. Where is Duirwaigh going from here?

Duirwaigh started as a dream. That dream has birthed an art gallery, a publishing house, and a full-service artist management company. The next step for us is film. When Silas Toball, of Goblin Design (www.goblindesign.com) joined Duirwaigh as partner, we redesigned the Website and created our first inspirational flash film "A Knock at the Duir" and posted it online. We were shocked by the response. The outpouring of love and appreciation from the thousands who have seen the film worldwide has been overwhelming. We'd like to continue touching lives through this newest division, Duirwaigh Films.

However, the dream behind Duirwaigh is as yet unfulfilled, for these companies exist for the sole purpose of raising interest in—and funds for—our artist retreat, museum and educational facility, loosely titled "The Center for Inspiration."

To keep what inspiration we have in this world, I firmly believe that we must care for our artists and visionaries. The Center for Inspiration will do just that. In a setting of peace and beauty, we will seek to shape a new community of dreamers and provide the inspiration to actualize those dreams. By creating an atmosphere of magic, filling a museum with works of wonder, and developing conferences, workshops, and exchange programs that stimulate artistic enrichment, we hope to foster a ripple of creative synergy with widening circles of impact in our world. In building this vision, the words of Shel Silverstein have been my mantra:

Listen to the musin'ts, child, listen to the don'ts
listen to the shouldn'ts, the impossibles, the won'ts
listen to the never haves, then listen close to me
anything can happen, child, anything can be.

I've heard the rumors. I've been told the tales. "This will never work. You cannot be a dreamer and live in reality at the same time. You cannot run a business from your heart, or you'll run it into the ground." But I say profit follows passion—never forfeit the latter for the former. Life is too short to live it uninspired. Discover your passion and you'll discover your purpose. There is no more effective way to find yourself the hero of your own story. ❧

Please visit Angi Sullins and Duirwaigh Gallery on the Web at: www.DuirwaighGallery.com

fish & dracula

Continued from page 45

"No." The girl was crying. Her hands were sticky with blood. "Something *bit* me."

Katya helped her to her feet and together they stumbled inside. The landlady took one look and phoned what Katya assumed to be a local doctor, then took charge of the injured girl. Katya made her way back to her seat. The floating sense of unreality was back. Everyone was staring.

"What happened?" Amy was shocked out of her bad temper. She put an arm around Katya and guided her into her seat.

"Something bit her," Katya said, in an unsteady echo. "In the neck."

No one said anything. Then, as though a collective decision had been discussed and made, everyone reached for their coats and bags and left the pub.

"Look, I'll see you back up the hill," Damian said.

"Yeah, OK. Thanks." She had no intention of protesting.

That night she lay staring sleeplessly into the darkness. She though of vampires, real ones, ones in which, she realized, she did not believe. The Goth scene was no more than role play, a veneer of dark glamor over the banality of everyday life. But what if some people had started taking it too seriously? She knew that such things happened: there were lifestyle vampires in the States, blood drinkers, people who'd had their teeth filed into fangs. She had never met one. She wondered whether Lily had. And thinking back, the person who told her about the lifestyle vampires was Julian....

The thunderous knock on the door brought her bolt upright in bed, heart pounding.

"Who is it?"

"It's me."

Warily, Katya opened the door to see Julian standing in the hallway. He looked disheveled, wide-eyed. He said, "She's going to rise."

"What?"

"Lily. She's going to rise." He made an impatient gesture. "She was bitten last night, and tonight, it's Samhain. She's coming back. I know it."

"Julian, I don't think—"

But he was off, running down the stairs of the guesthouse. Katya hovered in the doorway, wanting desperately to go back to bed. She heard the bang of the front door. But in the end, she could not just leave him. She pulled her clothes over her satin nightdress and followed.

The town was very dark and very quiet. Julian was nowhere to be seen, but as Katya reached the gate, she glimpsed him running along the edge of the cliff in the direction of the whale's jawbone. She thought, *God, if he throws himself off ...* She might not like Julian much, but it was an awful thought. It was still raining, a thin cold drizzle, and the grass must be as slippery as ice.

"Julian! Wait!"

He did not look back. Katya charged across the road. The rain was getting heavier and a wind was rising, whipping salt into her face. There was a concrete path running along the cliff and she ran down it, spitting wet hair from her mouth. She could hear the crash and boil of the waves against the rocks. Ahead, she saw Julian stumble.

"Wait!" she cried again.

He struggled to his feet and ran on, but when he reached the whale's jawbone, he doubled up, leaning with one hand on the white, spined arch. Katya could feel a cramp of her own, a tight stitch across her gut. The rain was driving in hard and she could barely see the edge of the cliff now. She slowed and paused, terrified of falling. Above Julian's head, at the joint of the whalebone arch, there was a kind of sparkle of darkness, something that moved and twisted in the air.

"Julian?"

She hurried forward, as quickly as she dared. It came again, darting and swift, and there were more of them now.

She reached the top of the cliff. The jawbone towered above her. She saw straight through it into a churning mass of spray. But the cliff was high, she should not be able to see the sea—yet there were huge silver forms gleaming within it, leaping, hurtling upward in a blur of scales and teeth. There was an amoebic twist of the edge of the shoal and Julian was gone, falling back without a sound into the wall of water beyond the jawbone. A glistening shape sprang from the shoal to hang in the air before Katya's face. She looked into a cold, gleaming eye, alight with gestalt intelligence. The mouth of the great fish opened in a slow gasp to reveal razor teeth, then closed once more. With a flick of its tail it was gone, back into the mass, and the shoal shot through the jawbone and streamed down into the town. In wonder, she watched it go. When it hit the harbor it dispersed; she saw silver flickers in the streets, hunting.

At Samhain, the dead return, she thought, but there is nothing to say which dead, nor which part of the natural world, ravaged and overplundered, might turn tail on its predators on this one unnatural night of the year. She ran all the way back to the guesthouse and pulled the bedcovers over her head like a child.

In the morning, it was sunny and cold. There was no sign of rain. She dressed in her only pair of jeans and a red sweater. Avoiding questions from the landlady, she paid her bill with a check. This time, she signed it Katy. ❧

my sister's face

Continued from page 40

"H—her face, one eye grew swollen and infected, weeping pus and tears, while the skin puckered, rotting from within."

"She must have been in great pain."

"She screamed for hours."

Lord Shigekazu looked like the gods themselves had touched him, and they had used a heavy hand.

"It must have felt like a lifetime of suffering," the bride continued.

"Better her lifetime than mine. Come, let us lie together, my beautiful blossom."

He lifted his hands to the *tsuno kakushi*. The thin, white silk slid to the floor. Beneath it, as I had known, was not Uma's pretty face, but Oiwa's terrible one. The white rice powder did not conceal the crust of seeping yellow that oozed from her eye. Nor did it cover the bleak decay of her skin as it sloughed off.

"Come, my husband, kiss me." Oiwa held her arms out to Iyemon. "Embrace me."

Iyemon shrieked and pulled his katana from its sheath. With a single slice, he swept the head off her shoulders. It rolled to where Shigekazu and I spied from behind the bamboo screen.

But it was not Oiwa's face on that severed head, but Uma's.

Shigekazu and I scrambled from cover, away from the grisly remains. Iyemon screamed when he saw us, a cry of rage and madness. He charged at us with his katana upraised. I freed my blade, parried aside his wild strike, and Shigekazu tangled his legs from behind. I knocked his katana from his hand, and together, Shigekazu and I bound him. He gibbered all the while, raving that he saw Oiwa's face in the lantern, her *yurei* in the corner, her shadow behind the bamboo screen. When I glanced at these places, all I saw were lantern, corner, and screen.

Shigekazu sent for the magistrate and told them the whole story, clearing Oiwa of any sin. The magistrate sentenced Iyemon to death for his crimes.

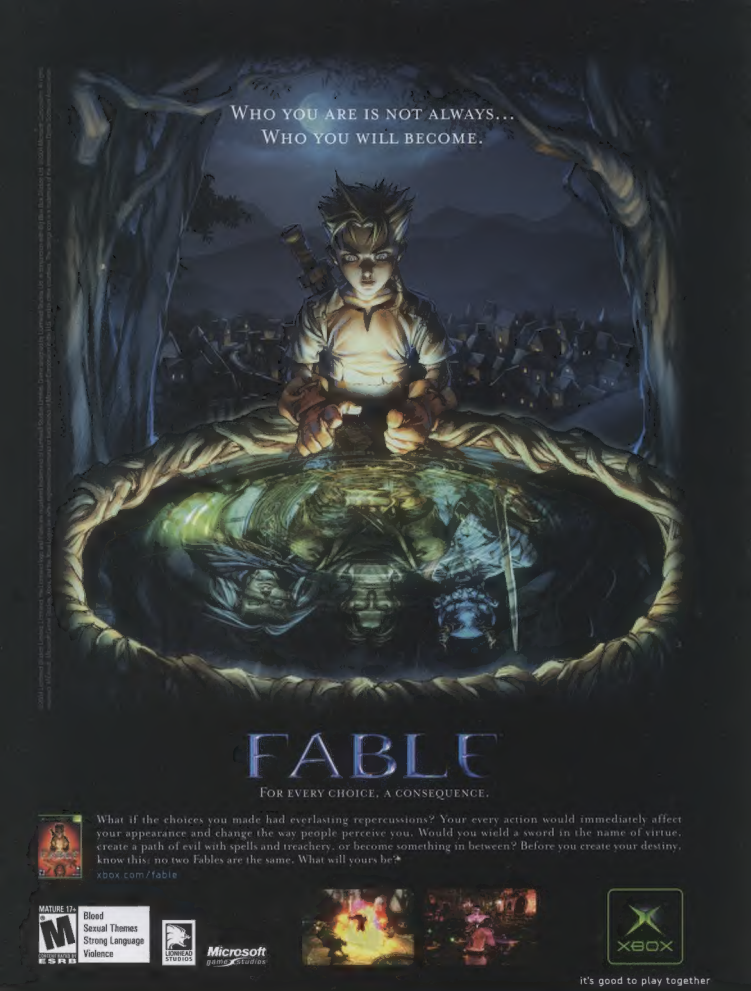
In the days before his execution, Iyemon continued to screech and wail in his tiny cell, mad with terror. His eyes rolled in his head, following unseen specters, unknown horrors, all with Oiwa's face. In the end, the headman's sword was a mercy.

That night, I prayed before the altar of my ancestors.

"Oiwa, my part in restoring your honor is done. Are you pleased?"

There was no sound but the wind.

I did not see her again that night, or any other. Although I have heard stories in the village of a beautiful maiden wearing a peacock blue kimono, walking among the plum trees, singing. They say her face is exquisite, but her song sad. ❧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